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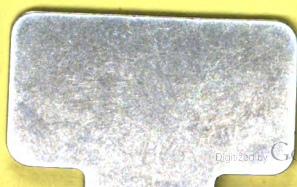


*Village Conversations on the
Liturgy of the Church of England*

George Davys

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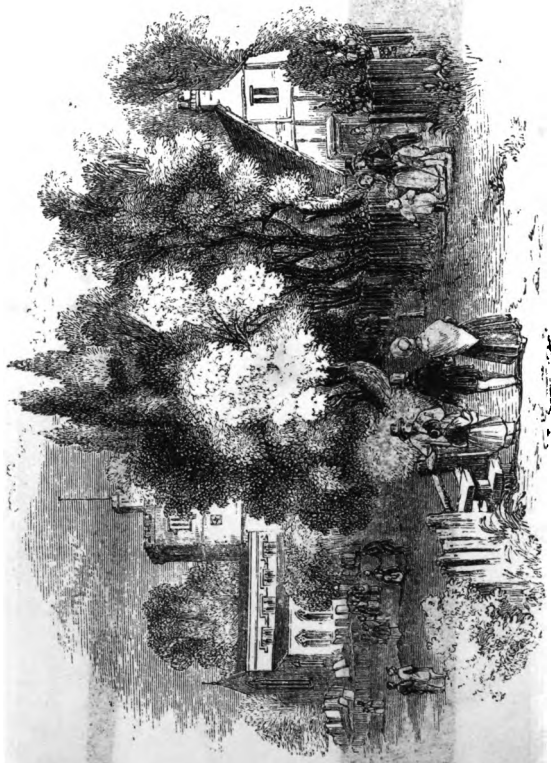
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Dorothy









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VILLAGE CONVERSATIONS
ON
THE LITURGY
OF
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

BY
GEORGE DAVYS, D.D.
BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH.



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CHAPTER I.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN WILLIAM WALKER AND THOMAS BROWN.

Thomas. WHERE have you been this morning, William?

William. Been ! Why you know what day it is, Thomas ?

T. To be sure I do. It is Sunday.

W. Then how could you ask me where I had been ? I have been to church, to be sure.

T. How could I tell that? there is many a one ~~that~~ does not go to church every Sunday.

W. Yes, many a one indeed! And by your asking, I should guess that you had not been there yourself to-day.

T. No, I have not been there to-day. But I go sometimes.

W. Sometimes! Well, I wonder how any body can ever stay away.

T. Stay away! why many people do *that*.

W. Yes; careless, thoughtless people, who never consider what they were sent into the world for. Such people go out of the world just as ignorant with regard to their souls, as they came into it. But one would not wish to imitate such people as those, you know, neighbour. We should try to imitate *good* people, and to be like *them*. Now they *do* go to the house of God on a Sunday.

T. I don't know; I think some of the people that stay away are just as good as they that go. Why, my mistress, my Lady Patience, never goes. I have worked on her estate this twelvemonth, and I have never seen her go to the church all that time: and yet everybody says what a good lady she is; she is so good to the poor, that everybody loves her.

W. If Lady Patience forgets to worship her Maker, she is not a good lady, though everybody should say she is. Good Christians, it is certain, will always be glad to help the poor when they can: but they will not neglect other parts of their duty, and especially the worship of God. He that said, "Blessed is the man that considereth the poor and needy," said also, "Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy."

T. Well, but why does not my lady go to church, then? I am sure she is a good Christian.

W. Indeed, Thomas, I believe she is ; and I can tell you *why* she does not go to church. She has been kept to the house more than a twelvemonth with a sad lingering sickness. Poor lady ! They say she is almost always in pain, and that her poor body is nearly wasted to a skeleton. She *cannot* go. She would be glad enough to go, if she could. When she was well, and a long while after too, she never kept away from church on a Sunday. She was always in her place. How often have I seen her on her knees in the church, with her whole heart and soul engaged in the prayers ! And I am sure the Lord has heard her. All her desire was to do good, and to be good ; to do the will of God, and to submit to it ;—and the Lord *has enabled her*. What is it, do you think, that supports her, and comforts her, under her long affliction ? They say she is hardly ever an hour of her life out of pain ; and yet her nurse told me, that you could never hear her say one murmuring word.—What do you think it is, Thomas, that supports her ?

T. I cannot tell.

W. Why, it is religion. She has prayed to God, and He has heard her. I remember, one Sunday, I happened to sit almost against her pew at church, and when the minister said these words, "*In all time of our tribulation, and in all time of our wealth*"—from her very heart she seemed to say, "*Good Lord, deliver us.*" And the Lord has heard her, and has delivered her in both these trials. It pleased God to give her *wealth*, I mean riches and prosperity : and she has always employed them in doing good, and seems to have been delivered from the snares to which they often lead ; and now, in the time of her *tribulation*, and sickness, and sorrow, she is delivered from murmuring

and repining, and is supported by Him whose help she so earnestly begged for.

T. Well, I knew she was an excellent lady: but I never knew that she had ever been so true to her church. But, however, this was before I came into the parish, and so I was not likely to know. But, be that as it will, there are many people that go to church no oftener than I do.

W. Yes, but what a reason is that, neighbour! There is a right and a wrong in all these matters: and *wrong* cannot be *right*, though all the world should practise it. The Lord will judge us all: and dreadful will be the punishment of those who wilfully do what they know to be contrary to his will. If I imitate the *actions* of the wicked, I must receive the *punishment* of the wicked. I can find no comfort in *that*, neighbour.

T. No, that's true, indeed! To be sure, it was very foolish of me to say I might do wrong because other people did. But I must not talk in that way again: and, moreover, I mean to keep to my church better than I have done. But yet it seems to me that many people go to church without being much the better for it.

W. Yes; and many people sit down to a good dinner every day, but their stomachs are in such a bad state that their food does not do them much good. And yet you and I should not wish to go without our dinners, neither.

T. No, that we should not.

W. Well, it is just so with *spiritual* food. They that do not care about being nourished by it, and have no appetite for good things, will come out of church just as empty as they went in;—but “blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.”

T. Well, I really think it is so.

W. Why, it *must* be so. It is in the Bible, Thomas, and I'll show it you directly.—Here, look here.*

T. Well, I see it—I see it—and I have experienced the truth of it in one way: but, unluckily for me, it is the *wrong* way. I have *not* hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and so I have *not* been filled.

W. But I think, neighbour, I can see by your looks, that you do not mean to go so carelessly to church any more. If you desire to do the will of God, you will think it a great blessing that you can go to his house and beg his help. There is one of the Collects of the Church says, “We cannot do anything that is good without Thee, O Lord.”† Now I call it a great privilege that we may go to the Lord’s house, to beg Him to help us on the way of godliness and in the path of duty.

T. But cannot a man say his prayers at home?

W. Yes, a man *can*; and if he be a Christian man, he *will*. But this does not keep him from church. No, no, neighbour; it sends him to it. You may take this for a constant rule, that “those who pray most at home, will be the most glad to pray in the house of God.”

T. Why, I cannot say that I prayed much in the church when I did go. I was sometimes thinking of other things when I was there. But I know now that it was a great sin to do so; but I have practised many a sin besides that—and do now—many a one.

W. Well, then, Thomas, you must not lose another opportunity of seeking repentance and forgiveness. If you would read your Bible, and go constantly to church, you would see the need

* Matthew v. 6.

† Collect for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

of repenting of your sins, and you would find that they might all be forgiven.

T. What, then, do you think I may go on in my wicked, careless ways, and that I shall have everything forgiven?

W. No, no, Thomas; I doubt we shall not find one word of that sort, either in the Bible, or in the Prayer Book. "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins," says the Bible, "shall have mercy."* And in the Prayer Book, when we speak of true repentance, we show what true repentance means by praying "that the *rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy.*"†

T. Well, but I cannot lead such a life.

W. Why, it seems as if you did not greatly desire it. You say, that when you were in the church, you did not pray for grace to enable you to please God;—and that is the reason why you have not been able to please Him. "Without Thee," says one of our prayers, "we are unable to please Thee."‡

T. Well, I certainly did not ask his help, as if I cared about it, and so I have not been able to please Him. I had no desire to please Him.

W. Well, but the Prayer Book teaches you to ask for that too, and tells you that it is God who both "puts in our minds good desires, and enables us to bring the same to good effect."§

T. Why, William, you seem to find out everything that is good in the Prayer Book.

W. There is everything good, Thomas, to be had from Him, who is the "Author and Giver of *all good things.*"||

* Proverbs xxviii. 13.

† Absolution.

‡ Collect for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.

§ Collect for Easter-day.

|| Collect for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

T. Why, that is from the Prayer Book again!

W. Yes, it certainly is. The Prayer Book helps us to pray. We there offer up our prayers to the Father, through the Son : and we are encouraged to hope that He will send us every spiritual gift and blessing.

T. Why, you have shown me already something exactly suited to my case. I stand in need of pardon for past sin, and I ought to lead a pure and holy life, and I want good desires.

W. Yes, you want those very things which the Gospel teaches you that you ought to have. And the Gospel promises you that you *shall* have them, if you ask rightly ; and the Prayer Book puts you into a *way* of asking rightly. The Gospel contains "glad tidings of great joy : " and the Prayer Book teaches us to pray that this joy may be made our own.

T. Well, then, I see that the Prayer Book is made according to the Bible, and so a man cannot despise the Prayer Book without despising the Bible too. Now, I know several people who care nothing about the Prayer Book, and sometimes even make game of it.

W. Yes, Thomas, and they make game of the Bible too. We have seen a great deal of this in our own times. Such people are against the Bible and the Prayer Book, because the Bible and the Prayer Book are against them. Poor souls !—But the Prayer Book shows me how to pray for *them*. "O, merciful God, who wouldest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live, have mercy upon all infidels (unbelievers), and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock that they may be saved : " * and I would beg of the Lord, that He would "make them a clean heart, and

* Collect for Good Friday.

renew a right spirit within them ;”* that instead of spreading about wickedness and sin, as they do, they might “teach his ways unto the wicked, that sinners might be converted unto Him.” But, whatever other people may think of these matters, Thomas, if you and I go to church, and wish to be good Christians, we should try to get all the benefits we can from the prayers ; we should seek to have our minds fixed upon what we are doing.

T. To be sure we should. But for my part, William, I cannot say that I understand much about the Church Service. I wish you could explain to me a little about the *meaning* of it.

W. Why, Thomas, I think you might have asked many a better man than me ; but, however, I shall be willing to do the best I can.

T. Why, neighbour, I do not ask you to explain the meaning of every one of the prayers, but only just to give me a sort of notion about them, that I may know a little what I am doing when I am in the church ; for, to tell you the truth, I know very little about the matter. I hardly can tell when I am to kneel down, or when I am to stand up, or when I am to sit ; and I want to know all about it.

W. Why, Thomas, there are a great many little tracts about the Prayer Book, that explain these things a great deal better than I can. And there is one, at the beginning of many of the Prayer Books, that I have learned a good deal from.

T. What is it called ?

W. “Directions for a devout and decent Behaviour in the Public Worship.”† But pray, Thomas, did you never read the *rubrics* themselves ? Those

* 51st Psalm.

† A Tract bound up with the Prayer Books which are circulated by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

rubrics tell you all about it ; and if you were to read them, you could not well make a mistake about the proper time to kneel, and stand, and so on.

T. Why, to tell you the truth, William, I do not know what you mean by *rubrics*.

W. Oh, don't you ? well, then, I'll tell you. The *rubrics* mean those directions that you see, in the Prayer Book, commonly printed in a different sort of letters from the rest—*Italic* letters, I think they call them.

T. Oh, then, the *rubrics* are the *directions*, are they ? Well, then, if they are *directions*, they must *direct* me what to do. But why do they call them *rubrics* ?

W. I think I have heard say that *rubric* is a kind of old Latin word that means *red letters* ; because, in former times, these directions were printed in red letters.

T. Well, then, I must study these *directions*. But nevertheless, William, I should like to hear you explain a little besides ; for I may, perhaps, understand rather better from your plain way of talking.

W. Well, I will do the best I can, the next time we have half an hour to spare, towards it ; but I must be going now ; my wife will be expecting me home to dinner by this time.

T. Yes, it must be about the time now. I suppose your wife has been staying at home to cook your dinner

W. Oh, no ; she went home by the other road, and so you did not see her. No, Thomas, it would not be so easy a matter as you suppose to keep my good woman away from church ; and, to tell you the truth, I should not feel comfortable at my prayers myself if I thought that she had not the same privilege as I had. Besides, I think my dinner,

somehow, would not taste half so good if I thought it kept either of us from worshipping God.

T. Well, but what are you to do for your Sunday's dinner if there's nobody left at home to cook it ?

W. Oh, never fear that, Thomas ; we shall not go without our dinner, I dare say. A few potatoes will boil without any body to watch them ; and my wife cooked something yesterday, and we shall have that cold to-day.

T. I think my wife would like to do as yours does, for she is very fond of going to church. But she cannot go now, at any rate ; she must stay and take care of the little children ; for they cannot walk nor take care of themselves, poor things !

W. Why, no, Thomas ; where there is a family of little children it is a different matter ; the poor babies must be looked after. But, however, we will have a little more conversation about these things another time, if we can find an opportunity.

T. Why, William, I suppose you are going to church this afternoon ?

W. To be sure I am.

T. Well, then, cannot you call in at our house as you go ? You can come about half an hour before the bells begin to chime, and then we can talk about these things, and after that we can walk to church together.

W. Well, then, Thomas, it shall be so.

T. But, William, before you go, I wish you would just tell me when the Prayer Book was made, and who made it ; I mean, who put the prayers together.

W. Oh, we can talk about that this afternoon ; and so good-bye for the present.



CHAPTER II.

WILLIAM, THOMAS, AND THEIR WIVES.

William. WELL, Thomas, I am come, according to my promise, and I have brought my wife with me.

Thomas. So much the better. My wife and I are glad to see you both. Come, sit down, and we can have a little more discourse on what we were talking about this morning.

Mrs. Brown. Ay, pray do, neighbours ; for I shall be glad of an opportunity of hearing a little about these things myself. My husband seemed to be pleased with what you said to him this morning, William. He tells me he is going to church with you this afternoon : I wish I could go too ; for, some how, I cannot feel half as I should do if I stay away from church. However, there is no

such thing as leaving home where there are little children to take care of.

Mrs. Walker. Why, no, neighbour ; they cannot be left alone, to be sure. I remember, when I had little ones myself, I sometimes used to take it hard to be kept at home so much. However, if we have a family it is our duty to look after it, and we must not repine. Besides, it becomes us to be diligent about our *home* duties as well as our *church* duties.

Mrs. B. Why, that is certainly true. But, then, many people make an excuse of that sort for neglecting their church, and being wonderfully busy about their matters at home : they talk a great deal about their duty and their industry, and so on ; whilst, all the time, they are wholly neglecting the worship of God. Now, neighbour Walker, I cannot think that these people are right.

Mrs. W. No, nor I either. I often think of what our blessed Lord said to those who were for this half and half kind of service : "These things ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone." Besides, neighbour, I know this very well, that if we keep away long together from a place of worship, we are apt to grow careless and indifferent about good things ; and so I have always tried to get to church, if possible. When I had a baby I sometimes used to carry it with me, if I thought it would be still, and not interrupt other people. But then I used to sit as near to the church door as I could, and if the child would not be so quiet as one could wish, I could easily get out, without making much disturbance. And, then, I had another way of managing sometimes. We had three or four kind sort of neighbours about us, who had little children as well as myself ; and

so we took it by turns to stay at home ; I used to take care of all the children one day whilst the rest of the neighbours went to church, and another neighbour used to take care of them all another day ; and so, amongst us, we managed pretty well.

T. Well, wife, I think that was a very good way ; and I guess you will not be long before you get hold of some of your neighbours to make that agreement. But, now, I shall be glad, William, if you would go on to tell me a little more about the Prayer Book, as you promised. And first I should like to know *when* the Prayer Book was made, and *who* made it.

W. Why, I wonder what that can signify. If the prayers be good, and suitable to your case and mine, what is it to either of us when the prayers were made, or who made them ?

T. Very true ; but yet, as I do not know much about these matters myself, I should like to be taught by them that do. Now, if these prayers were put together in times of great darkness and ignorance, or if they were put together by men who did not know much about the matter themselves, I should not feel as if I could depend on their being right.

W. Why, no ; that is true enough. And by the times of darkness and ignorance, I suppose you mean those times when there was nothing but the Popish religion in England ; when there were no Bibles nor Prayer Books in our own language, but everything was done in Latin.

T. Yes, those are the times I was thinking of : and they must have been times of wonderful ignorance ; for, if the books were all in a foreign language, how could such poor people as you and I ever understand a word about them ? Why, we might just as well have had no books at all. To be

sure, great and learned men might know what they were about ; and I dare say there might be many a good man even in such times as those.

W. To be sure. The learned understood the meaning of what they were doing ; and, without a doubt, there were many good Christian men among them : and such sort of men were always wishing the people to be instructed as well as themselves ; but they could not bring it about. At length, however, it pleased the Lord to let the light of the Gospel shine upon this kingdom ; for at the time of the *Reformation*, the Bible was put into the English language, so that everybody might then have an opportunity of knowing what religion was.

T. Pray, William, what do you mean by the *Reformation* ?

W. Why, I mean the time when all these things were *reformed* and set to rights ; when the errors of *Popery* were laid aside. This must now be nearly three hundred years ago ; this great change began in the time when Henry the Eighth was king of England. It was a great blessing that there were then so many holy scriptural men, and so learned, too, that they could take the Bible and turn it out of those foreign languages into our own ; and then they were so fond of the work, too ! They seemed so desirous that all the people should have the Scriptures among them ! And then, after Henry died, his son, Edward the Sixth, came to the throne, an excellent young king. He encouraged everybody to read the Scriptures, and bade all the holy and learned men to explain them to the people. It was a sad day for the godly people in England when this good king died. He was a king, I think, only about seven years ; but he got a better crown in heaven. Then, after he was gone, came bloody Queen Mary ; and she was always trying to keep

the people from the way of instruction, and to bring back the old days of ignorance again ; but those godly men that the good young king had encouraged would not allow of it ; they would never flinch from the true religion, and they were willing to be burnt to death rather than that the people should be kept in darkness.

T. Yes ; I have read about them in the Book of Martyrs. Latimer, and Cranmer, and Ridley, and many such holy men, were burnt to death for the sake of the true religion of Christ.

W. Yes ; and there would have been a great many more, I dare say, if it had not pleased God to take away this cruel queen in a very few years, and send us a better.* Then these good men who had been so anxious to give the people the Bible, were likewise anxious that they should have a book of prayers according to the Bible. And they knew well what the Bible was ; and this is the reason why the Prayer Book has so much of the Bible in it, and that it is, as I may say, all over Scripture. The Prayer Book directs that, every time we go to church, we shall hear two chapters of the Bible read ; one out of the *Old Testament* and one out of the *New* ; besides the Epistle and the Gospel, both commonly out of the New Testament. And then we have two or three chapters out of the book of Psalms, besides a great deal more out of the Bible ; so that, even though a person cannot read, he may get to know a great deal about Scripture if he goes constantly to church.

T. Well, I do not *now* wonder at all that there is so much of Scripture in the Prayer Book, since you say that it was put together by such truly Scriptural men. What a useful thing it was, to be sure, for the people to have a book of prayers in

* Queen Elizabeth.

their own language, instead of going on with a book that they could not understand ! But I should guess that everybody was not pleased with all these amendments ; I dare say that some of them would have rather kept to their old customs, and gone on in their ignorance.

W. Oh, yes ; many, to be sure, were offended at these great improvements, and did not know what to think of them at first. But the wise and pious Reformers proceeded in their work by degrees. When first the young King Edward ordered a Prayer Book to be made, it was not made just as it is now. But in a few years afterwards, when the people got to think less of their old customs, and to see from the Bible what was the right way of praying, then the rest of the old popish ways were left off, and some more prayers were put into the book.* Many of the prayers were indeed used by the *first Christians* ; I mean those godly believers that lived in the time when our blessed Saviour was in this world, or soon afterwards. These we may be sure would be kept. It is of great value to us to have the prayers which were used in those glorious times, when the Gospel was first preached to the world, and before the ignorance or craftiness of men had tempted them to corrupt the truth.

T. Well, I thank you, William, for telling me these things. I see the value of the book now. To be sure, what a little benefit have I ever got from it ! However, I see now where the fault lay ; not in the Prayer Book, but somewhere else rather nearer home.

W. Well, neighbour, if you see the fault to be in *yourself*, that is the first step towards amendment.

T. Well, I hope I shall find it so. The fault, to

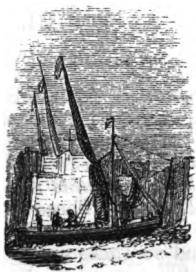
* The first book of King Edward VI. was published in 1548, the second in 1552.

be sure, must have been in myself. What in the world could have ever been the matter with me, that I should have thought lightly of a book so full of treasures as this—a book so according to Scripture, and so full of Scripture! Why, here we are taught to pray in the words of our Lord Himself, and to worship in the way of his blessed Apostles! And these treasures were brought together for our use by those godly martyrs who knew so well what the Gospel was, and who died for the sake of it. And they did not do the work in a hurried, careless manner, either; but took time about it, that they might do it well. To be sure, the Lord would bless the work of such men as these.

W. We cannot doubt it, Thomas.

T. And now, William, I should be much obliged to you if you would show me a little of the plan of the book; for when so much has been done for us, we ought certainly to give diligent heed to profit by it.

W. To be sure; and I'll try to show you some of the particulars, as well as I am able.





CHAPTER III.

THE SENTENCES.

William. As soon as the minister gets up to speak in the church, the very first words he speaks come out of the Scripture: "*When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.*" These words have been of great use to me. I know that I have often offended God, and so these words are very full of comfort to me. They contain what we all stand in

need of, *a message of pardon to repentant sinners*. This, you know, neighbour, is the Gospel message.

Thomas. But does the minister always begin with these same words ?

W. No, not always the same. There are *eleven* sentences, as you will see if you look into your Prayer Book ; they are all taken out of the Scripture, and he always reads *one or more* of them. He must do it ; the service *must* begin with the words of God Himself. The minister may read which of these sentences he pleases, it makes but little difference ; and whichever he reads, I always think that I am thereby exhorted and invited to repent, and to confess and forsake sin, and to seek for mercy. I always take care, if possible, to be at church in time, for I would not willingly miss this part of the service. I always think it sounds so solemn to have the Lord Himself, as we may say, speaking to us so awfully, and yet so mercifully, when we are all met together to worship Him.

T. Why, certainly, that is a noble way of beginning the service.

THE EXHORTATION.

W. Yes ; and as soon as one or more of these sentences have been read, the minister speaks to us all, and tells us that the Scriptures give us great encouragement in many places, and especially in the sentences which he has just been reading, to confess our sins and wickedness ; and that we are not to try and hide them from God, but humbly and sincerely to confess them, and repent of them, and endeavour to forsake them, for that then we may hope to have them forgiven through the great and infinite goodness and mercy of God. Then he tells us that we ought, at all times, to humble

ourselves before God, and to acknowledge our sins before him. And he says that we ought particularly to do so when we are all met together to worship God. Then he begs and entreats of us all to join with him in confessing our sins, and pleading for pardon. He also tells us that he will lead the prayers, and that we can follow him with a low, humble voice : and he desires us to be sincere in our hearts whilst we confess with our lips.

T. I never have heard *that* when I have been at church. Our minister always speaks one or two of those sentences which you have been telling me about, and then goes on directly to the prayer about "Dearly beloved brethren," &c.

W. That is not a prayer, Thomas. The minister is speaking to *us* ; and, as Christians should love one another like brothers, he calls us his "dearly beloved brethren."

T. Well, I see how it is now. But how could I have ever thought that this was a prayer ! I do believe, then, that the minister does speak to the people, just as you have been saying ; but I do not think that you made use of the exact words.

W. No ; but I think I gave you the exact sense.

T. Well, now, when I am at church this afternoon, I think I shall understand what I am about there. I must *listen* to this exhortation ; I must not say it after the minister, as if it was a prayer.

W. No, that is very improper ; and when people mutter these words after the minister it shows that they do not understand what they are about. You must be quite silent at this part, and *listen*. It is called the *Exhortation*, because in it the minister *exhorts* the people to confess their sins.

T. Well, now tell me what you do after the minister has exhorted you to confess your sins.

THE GENERAL CONFESSION.

W. Why, we then fall down on our knees, and confess how sadly we have neglected our "Almighty and most merciful Father," and how we have wandered from his holy ways, like sheep gone astray. We confess that we have offended Him, by neglecting what "we ought to have done," and by doing "what we ought not to have done," and that there is in us nothing that can be called good—no spiritual health. Then we pray for *mercy*, of which we miserable sinners stand so much in need. Then we pray that the Lord would restore us to his favour, and we plead the merits of Jesus Christ, through whom the promises of pardon to the penitent are given. Then, through the same Saviour, we beg that the Lord would send his Holy Spirit to enable us to walk in newness of life, and thus to glorify his holy name.

T. Yes, William, I see that you know how to pray. I like those words that you have been speaking; you have just expressed what I should wish to say, but I cannot find proper words to pray in.

W. Why, you are to follow the minister in this confession, and say after him just what he says.

T. Well, but suppose I don't like the minister, and don't think that he knows much how to pray, must I follow him *then*, and say just as he says? I'd follow him with all my heart, if I could be sure that he would put up just such prayers as you have been speaking of.

W. Why, Thomas, there lies the beauty of having a Prayer Book. The minister must pray in the words of the book; *he mayn't go an inch out of the way*; he must pray in the way that I have been telling you. This part of the service,

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you know, is called the *General Confession*, because we *all confess* our sins in it ; in this we are all required to join with the minister.

T. Well, I think, I see the reason of that. Being *all sinners*, we should *all* join in the *confession* of our sin.

W. Yes, we are directed to do so. The *rubric* tells us that the *General Confession* is to be said by the whole congregation after the minister, the people all kneeling.

T. Well, but the people don't all *kneel* ; some do, to be sure ; but some sit and some stand.

W. Why, some people cannot read : and as they are not able to make out what the directions tell them, they do not know when to sit, and when to stand, and when to kneel.

T. Well, but I have seen some people that could read *sitting* at prayers.

W. Well, perhaps they might be lame, or sick, or have something the matter with them that they *could not* kneel ; and then, you know, it was excusable ; otherwise, I am sure it could not be decent to sit down whilst they were praying to God. *Standing* is much more decent than *sitting* ; but *kneeling* is the most proper of all ; and if we have got a Prayer Book to direct us, it is but right that we should go by it. Yes, and, moreover, if you will look into the Bible, Thomas, you will find that, when it tells you about people praying, it generally tells you that they were *on their knees*. It is true that we read sometimes of *standing* at prayers : but I cannot find out that any of the holy people, mentioned in the Bible, ever *sat down* to prayer.

T. Well, but, neighbour, do you think the posture of the body is of any signification ?

W. I think that religion being the one thing

needful, every thing belonging to it is of some signification: and if my blessed Lord, and his holy Apostles, set me the example of *kneeling* at prayer, it certainly must become me to follow it. It is true that a man may be on his knees and not have his heart engaged in prayer either—and then his *kneeling* will do him no good. But I often think, that when the heart is in any work, the body commonly bears a part, so that, from the *outward manner*, you may often judge of what is going on *within*. I took great notice of that a few days ago. I was with my master, receiving orders: and, you know, he is a magistrate. Two men were brought to him, accused of some crime or other. One of them I knew to be a hardened offender; and he seemed to have no respect at all for my master, but sat himself down quite carelessly on a chair, and did not seem to mind whether he was sent to prison or not. The other man, I knew, had a large family, and he seemed to be afraid that he and they would all be ruined if he was sent to gaol. To be sure, how did he go down on his knees to my master, and beg and entreat of him to spare him and his poor family!

T. But I think your master would not require the man to go down on his knees to *him*.

W. No, I don't say he would. I only say, that the *outward manner* of the body often shows how a man feels *within*. And if anybody will pay respect to *man*, surely we ought all to do so to *God*. And how strange does it seem for us to say in the church, "Oh, come let us worship, and *fall down* and *kneel* before the Lord our Maker," and then directly go and *sit* ourselves down as if we forgot we were in the presence of our Maker! just like those careless people who seem to go to church for nothing but to pass the time, and often

sit and sleep when they are there. To be sure, we must seek to have the *heart* engaged in prayer too, otherwise the right posture of the body will do us no good. Then, if we not only "bow down the stubborn knee," but humble the heart too ; if we thus "confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

T. Well, that is indeed a wonderful mercy to think of ; and it is what we every one of us must stand in need of,—to have our past sins forgiven, and to be cleansed from all unrighteousness.

W. Yes, but such is the wonderful mercy of God to those whose confession of sin is true and sincere. And it is for this reason, that as soon as we have finished the *Confession*, the minister goes on to read the *Absolution*.

THE ABSOLUTION.

T. Now let us read the direction, which you say is called the *rubric* : "*The Absolution or Remission of sins, to be pronounced by the Priest alone, standing, the people still kneeling.*" Now what is meant by the words *Absolution* and *Remission* ?

W. Why, these words mean the same as *Pardon* and *Forgiveness*.

T. Very well. And the minister is to say this *alone* ; and the people are not to say a word of it after him. Is not that the way of it ?

W. Yes, that is right.

T. And what is the reason why the people must not say this after the minister ?

W. Why, because it is the *minister's* business to declare to the people the Lord's forgiveness of sin.

T. Oh, then, the *Absolution* is not a *prayer* ; but the minister stands up here, to tell the people of

God's mercy in pardoning sin ; and we are to remain humble on our knees, to receive a message of mercy so much greater than we deserve.

W. Yes, that is the meaning of it.

T. Well, then, it must be a strange mistake to repeat this *Absolution* after the Priest,—as many people do.

W. Why, certainly, that is quite contrary to all sense, and it spoils the whole meaning of it ; for the *Absolution* is not a prayer *from* the people, but a message *to* them.

T. Why, then, as far as I can understand you, there has not *yet* been much that could properly be called *prayer*.

W. Why, no. So far all may, perhaps, be considered as a sort of a preparation for the prayers that are to come afterwards.

RECAPITULATION.

T. Yes, I see. For first the minister reads a *sentence* or *two* out of the Bible—then he speaks to the people in the *Exhortation*, and calls upon them to confess their sins. After confessing, and pleading for mercy, the Priest declares to them their pardon in the *Absolution*. But do you really think, William, that everybody in the church is pardoned, and reconciled to God, just because the Priest reads the *Absolution* to them ?

W. Why, Thomas, if you will only give another look at this *Absolution*, you will see that no such thing as that is meant by it.

T. It reads thus : “ Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ; who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live, and hath given power and commandment to his ministers to

declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins ; *He* pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel." I think I see now that it is Almighty God, and not the minister, who pardons the people. I have heard people make objections to this Absolution, but it must be because they do not understand it ; for we see, when we come to examine it, that it is all right,—it is *God*, not *man*, that pardons.

W. Right : and for fear that anybody should make a mistake here, the minister repeats it, and says, *He*, that is *God*, pardoneth and absolveth.

T. Then I see that the minister does not tell us that the Lord pardons *all*, but only "those who truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel ;" and it is the business of the minister to *declare* and *pronounce* to such as these, that *the Lord* pardoneth and absolveth them.

W. Yes, that is it.

T. Well, it is wonderful to think of, that there should be such merciful pardon for us, if we truly repent and believe. And I must think, that when we hear of our sins being forgiven, this greatly leads us to be thankful for such mercy ; and we can then with more heart join in prayer and praise, and call the Lord *our Father*. But there is one thing, William, that I should like to know, and that is, whether there is Scripture for all this, or not. I like the prayers wonderfully, as far as I see into them ; and I have a great notion that those godly martyrs would not have given us anything wrong, if they knew it ; but yet, you know, Scripture is above all. We must look to that.

W. Yes, Thomas, that is certain.

T. Well, then, do you think that, according to the Scriptures, God "hath given power and com-

mandment to his ministers to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins?" And do you think that we may depend upon the truth of this, that "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel?"

W. Yes, I do, certainly.

T. But why?

W. Why, because I find that the Scriptures assure us that through the merits of a Saviour there is a complete pardon for such persons. "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world."

T. Well, as this is so, it surely is the business of the minister to deliver God's gracious message to his people. This message is indeed "very full of comfort." But do you think that we may all take this comfort to ourselves?

W. Surely, all to whom it is delivered: all, that is, who "truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel." Here, you see, true repentance is required, and unfeigned faith.

T. Well, then, it is no message at all for the sinner.

W. Why, now, neighbour, it seems to me to be a message *on purpose* for the sinner; not, indeed, for him who wishes to *continue* in sin, but for him who is truly *sorry* for his past sins, and is *heartily* striving to forsake them:—for this, you know, is true repentance. And if we have *such* repentance and "a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ,"* we may hear the *Absolution* with joy, and take to ourselves all the benefits and all the blessings of it. But, as these good gifts come from God alone, the minister begs us to join in prayer "to beseech Him to grant us true repentance

* The Catechism.

and his Holy Spirit," that our present worship may be acceptable to Him, and "that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy;" for with such preparation we may hope at the last to "come to his eternal joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

T. Well, William, I am sure I am obliged to you for trying to make me understand these things. —And now I think it must be getting towards church-time, and I should by no means wish to be late; for I would not, on any account, lose the part of the service we have been talking about. And, perhaps, some other time, you will try and explain a little more to me.

W. To be sure. If what we have been talking proves to be of any use to you, I shall be glad to have a little more conversation with you on these matters, some time or other.

T. Well, I thank you, neighbour, I am sure; and I hope I shall not forget what you have told me. And somehow, now, I feel quite a pleasure at the thoughts of going to church.





CHAPTER IV.

SOME FEW WEEKS AFTERWARDS THOMAS AND WILLIAM
HAD THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION.

Thomas. I THINK, William, you said, that if what you have told me about the Prayer Book proved of any use to me, you would go on to teach me a little more. Now, since we talked last together, I really find much more satisfaction in going to church than ever I did before. I understand what I am about better. I give more attention to it.

William. Why, Thomas, there certainly is no

such thing as understanding anything properly without giving attention to it. And, surely, nothing is more deserving of our attention than the proper way of offering our services to God.

T. No, that is certain. It must be so, William. And now, I think,

THE LORD'S PRAYER

is the next part that we come to in the Church service ; and as this prayer is taken directly out of the Bible, and as our blessed Lord commanded us to use it, we are sure that it must be right. This prayer does indeed seem to ask for just such blessings as we stand in need of. But, besides this, it seems, somehow, to be full of Christian instruction too. I'll tell you what I mean, in my poor way, as well as I am able.

W. I should like very much to hear you, Thomas.

T. Well, then, you know that the first words we say are these, "*Our Father*." Now, I think that these two words might teach us a great deal. For when we say *Our Father*, this word *our* teaches us that all Christians, being sons of the same heavenly Father, should be united together like brothers. And this thought should put an end to quarrelling, and envyings, and jealousies ; and should teach us to help and comfort and pray for one another. And besides, when I say *Our Father*, I confess that I am praying for *other* Christians as well as for *myself*, and that they, too, are praying for *me*. And then, when we call the Almighty our *Father*, this should serve to put us in mind of the *duty* we owe to Him : that we should in all things seek to do his will ; and that we should endeavour to submit to whatever trials He may think it needful to lay upon us ; because, as He is our *Father*, He

must know best what is right and good for his children. And there is something, too, in the name of *Father* so engaging, that it seems wonderfully suited to win us to gratitude and love.

W. It does, indeed. If we receive blessings, how thankful it would make us, if we would always look upon them as coming from a kind and merciful *Father* ! And if we are visited with troubles and afflictions, what a wonderful support and comfort would it be to us, if we would consider that, as Job says, "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground," but that these trials are sent by One who knows that they are *for our good* ; that they are not sent to *vex* us, but to *improve* us : for that, "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him* ; and that He will, in the end, make all things "work together for good to them that love God !"†

T. Yes : and thus I think I see, that in these words a great deal of *duty* is taught : indeed, the whole "royal law" of love to God and man.—But now let us look at the next part of the Lord's Prayer, "*Hallowed be Thy Name.*" I am not sure that I quite understand the meaning of the word *hallowed*.

W. Why to *hallow* means to *keep holy*. And so when we say, *Hallowed be Thy Name*, we pray that the Lord's name may be *kept holy* ; that it may be *greatly honoured and revered* by ourselves, and by all mankind.

T. Well that is what I thought was the meaning of it. And here, too, I think I see a great duty pointed out to us : I mean this, that if we *pray* that the name of our heavenly Father may be revered and honoured in the world, we should also *strive* that it may.

* Psalm iii. 13.

† Romans vii. 29.

W. To be sure. For if we *pray* one way, and *act* another, this shows that there must be something strangely wrong within us ; some lurking unbelief, or some sad hypocrisy. You know our blessed Saviour tells us, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven ;" which shows us plainly that it is not enough merely to call upon the Lord, but that it should be the great business of our lives to seek to do his will.

T. To be sure. But yet we *must* call Him "Lord, Lord." I mean, we must seek Him in prayer.

W. Surely we must. I only mean that we must study to have our hearts set upon the things we pray for ; for it is sad, indeed, to have our *words* speaking one language, and our *actions* another. To be sure, if we neglect to call upon God in prayer, we cannot be said to *hallow* his name.

T. No, to be sure not. And then there is another way in which we go against our own prayers. I mean when we swear and curse, or when we use the name of our Maker, or our Saviour, in our common discourse, in a careless, irreverent manner ; I am sure this is not *hallowing* the name of God.

W. No, indeed, quite the contrary : it is, as I may say, *unhallowing* his name. It is destroying all respect and reverence for Him in ourselves and others.

T. Why, to be sure it must. And yet, what a deal of swearing and wicked words you do hear, if ever you happen to step into an alehouse, or any such places.

W. Why, yes, indeed you do ; and that is one reason why I never do step into such places. I cannot bear to hear such words. To think that

every comfort and every blessing we enjoy comes from our heavenly Father—to think that the very use of speech is his gift, and then to use that *gift* to the abuse of the *Giver*, is so dreadful, that it is only fit for those that forget who made them, who preserves them, and who redeemed them ; and so live, as it were, without God in the world.

T. It is, indeed, a shocking practice ! But let us see a little more about God's name being *hallowed*. Now, it seems to me, that if people stay away from church on a Sunday, and give their minds to those things which belong to the other six days of the week, then they are not *hallowing* the name of God.

W. No, to be sure not. The Lord has blessed the Sabbath-day, and *hallowed* it ; and He has commanded *us* to *hallow* his Sabbaths. We ought, therefore, to reverence them, and to keep them holy. We ought, indeed, to be very thankful that it hath pleased the Lord to allow one day in seven as a day of rest for those who labour hard the other six ; but we are moreover required to make the Sabbath a day particularly devoted to *religious* purposes. And, indeed, a sincere Christian will not consider this a *hardship*, but he will consider it as a very great and happy *privilege*.

T. Yes, indeed. But what a sad thing it is, then, that we should sometimes see, particularly in villages, shops open for buying and selling, and traffick-
ing on the Sabbath-morning, just like any other day of the week, and oftentimes worse ! Many poor people tell you that they cannot get their wages paid before Sunday morning, and so are forced to go to the shop *then*, to get the things for their Sunday's dinner.

W. Yes, but what a very bad practice it is to pay labourers their wages on the Sunday morning ! I think, however, that most masters have done away

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with that practice now ; and, to be sure, they *all* would, if they did but take it into proper consideration. It keeps many away from church, and it fills the minds of those who *do go* with concerns which should be kept away, as much as possible, on the Sabbath-day. All this paying, and receiving, and buying, and selling, take such hold of the thoughts, that there is hardly room left there for the *one thing* which is every day *needful*, and on the Sabbath-day is our special business. "God blessed the Sabbath-day," and He blesses those who keep it holy. You generally see, in a place where the Sabbath is well kept, that religion spreads, and that good morals, the fruits of religion, grow and thrive.

T. Yes, I know that it is so : and I am sure it concerns us all to look well to ourselves and to those that belong to us, that the Sabbath-day be kept holy. The shops should be shut ; and even those persons that make a trifle by selling a few cakes, or a little fruit, should take them out of their windows on a Sunday. I think this is of more consequence than we are at first apt to believe. It is a temptation in the way of them that sell these things, and turns their minds to their *worldly* gains instead of their *spiritual* good. It is forbidden in the Scriptures. It is doing the work of the wrong master. We cannot serve God and Mammon. And then, it tempts little children to buy these things on the Sabbath, and so takes away that reverence for the day in which they ought to be brought up ; and the bad consequence of this may perhaps last them all their lives, and be their ruin in the end.

W. Why, Thomas, I am quite sure that half the wickedness and misery we see in the world springs from the neglect of those things which at first appear so little. And I look upon it that this is

the reason why all buying and selling on a Sunday is forbidden by the law of the land, as well as by the Scriptures: and no one, I think, can do a greater act of charity than by endeavouring to uphold and maintain whatever is likely to make us religious and good; for I know that this is the only way to keep us out of danger, and to make us happy.*

T. Well, I see that we ought to hallow the Lord's name, by keeping his Sabbaths holy. I wish I had always seen the need of this. For, many times in my life have I stayed away from church on a Sunday; and when I *have* been there I have allowed my thoughts to wander, instead of trying to fix them on the prayers I have been offering up; or I have perhaps been whispering or talking to anybody that happened to sit near me. You know, when we are praying, or when the Scripture is being read to us, or when the word is preached, these are matters which, of all others, concern us the most; and if we are not in earnest about them, we cannot be said to *hallow* the name of God.—But pray, now, tell me, what is the meaning of "*Thy kingdom come*?"

W. When righteousness is spreading, and wickedness decaying, then God's kingdom may be said to flourish upon earth; and this is what we mean, when we pray that "God's kingdom may come." His kingdom of grace *here* is intended to prepare subjects for his kingdom of glory *hereafter*. Those who are righteous, faithful, and good, belong to God's kingdom upon earth: and they shall, without doubt, belong to his kingdom in heaven. Great

* An excellent sheet of Admonitions against Swearing, Sabbath-breaking, and Drunkenness, (by Sir James Stonhouse,) with abstracts of the penal laws in force against them, is circulated at the expense of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

need, then, have we all to pray that this kingdom may come upon earth ; and what a duty it becomes then for us to *strive* that it may, by promoting the knowledge of God, and by encouraging the growth of holiness and godliness by every means in our power ! How careful ought we to be to examine whether religion is flourishing in our own hearts ! for our blessed Lord says, “ The kingdom of God is within you ; ”—and how ought we to endeavour that Christian instruction may spread, and subjects daily be added to the Lord’s kingdom ! And then, how watchful we ought to be that our *example* may be such as shall encourage others to godliness ! And how fearful we ought to be of doing such things as may tempt any one to sin !—for this is furnishing subjects for Satan’s kingdom instead of *God’s*.

T. Yes ; and thus we see, in this petition too, how plainly duty goes along with prayer. And now, William, what do you think is the meaning of “ *Thy will be done ?* ” It seems to me, that in heaven, where there is no sin, the angels and saints are all trying how much they can do the will of God ; and here we seem to pray that it may be so with us upon earth ; that none of us may try to set up our own will against God’s ; but that we may strive in all things to do *his* will.

W. Yes ; and what a *duty* it is for us to try after this ! And what a *happiness* it would be if we were all aiming at it ! And moreover, when affliction or distress comes upon us, what a blessed thing it would be if we could all say, “ *Thy will be done !* ” To *say* it, indeed, is easy enough ; but it is not quite so easy to *feel* it. I am sure, then, we have every one of us need to pray for this spirit of Christian resignation, that we may be enabled, *from our hearts*, to say, “ *Thy will be done !* ”

T. And I think, too, that the next petition teaches us a good deal : “ *Give us this day our daily bread.* ” Now, here, we seem to acknowledge that every blessing we enjoy comes from the Lord. We can have no food to supply our bodily wants but by his gift. We may labour, and plough, and sow, but it is God that “ giveth the increase : ” and therefore, though we are called upon to labour and toil, yet it will all turn to nothing without the Lord’s blessing. We cannot make a blade of corn to spring : it groweth “ we know not how. ” We are therefore taught to ask of God to “ give us our daily bread. ” And when we say *bread*, I consider that this means such food as the Lord knows to be needful : and that we are not to be discontented with such things as He sees fit to provide for us ; that we are not to be hankering and repining after dainties and delicacies, as if the feeding of the *body* were all in all.

W. No ; and when we say, “ Give us *this day* our daily bread, ” this shows us that we are to pray every day, that our daily wants may be supplied ; and here we pray, likewise, for that “ bread of life ” which cometh from above ; that meat and drink which consists in doing the will of our heavenly Father.

T. Now, let us look at the next petition : “ *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.* ” How do you understand this ?

W. Why, I consider that we have all trespassed against God (that is, we have all offended Him) : and our sins are, as we may say, set down in his book, as debts against us. We pray, then, that He would *forgive* us these debts.

T. Yes, and I think it is, above all things, needful that we should pray for this ; because unless our sins are forgiven, unless they are blotted out

of the book of God's remembrance, they must stand against us at the last day. But the Scripture tells us that Christ has paid the ransom for our sins, and we have, therefore, great encouragement to pray, that, for his sake, our trespasses may be forgiven.

W. Yes ; and for fear we should think that his atonement should justify us if we continue wilfully to sin, He Himself commends us to ask that our trespasses may be forgiven, *as we forgive them that trespass against us*. This plainly shows, that if we are unkind and unforgiving to our fellow-creatures, if we bear malice or hatred against them, we cannot expect that God should forgive us our trespasses. Indeed, we rather pray that He should not forgive us ; we turn our prayers against ourselves.

T. Why, that is certainly true. But now tell me what you think is meant by "*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*"

W. Why, you know this world is a state of trial. Whatever be our condition, it has its temptations. Some situations, to be sure, expose us to more temptation than others. We therefore pray that the Almighty would keep us out of such situations as may tempt us to fall from Him ; for such is the weakness of our nature, that we have daily and hourly need of his strength to keep us from falling.

T. Yes, indeed ; and when such is our danger, how strange it is that any persons should put themselves into the midst of temptations ! I mean, by going amongst wicked company, where the temptation to sin is so great.

W. It is, indeed, a strange thing, and a very sad thing to think of. If we lead ourselves into temptation, we have no promise of help from above ;

we cannot expect to be *delivered from evil*. But, whilst we are aiming to do well,—striving to be followers of Christ,—and praying that we may be kept in the right path,—there is every encouragement for us,—there is every promise on our side. And as our heavenly Father is all-merciful in his willingness to help us, so we may be sure that He is fully able to do it—for his “*is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*”





CHAPTER V.

THE NEXT CONVERSATION BETWEEN THESE TWO LABOURERS WAS TO THE FOLLOWING EFFECT.

Thomas. WHEN you and I were last together, William, we were talking about *The Lord's Prayer*. Now, when we have finished that prayer, or indeed any other of the Church prayers, I think it sounds wonderfully solemn to hear all the people joining together, and saying, as if with one voice, "AMEN."

William. Yes, indeed it does. And, as *Amen* means *So be it*, when the people all join in saying this, it shows so much of union, such a hearty joining in the prayers, something so truly like public and social worship, that it is quite joyful to hear it. It is miserable work to hear nobody say *Amen* but the clerk ; just as if the people thought that *they* had nothing to do with the prayers, but that it was only an affair between the minister and the clerk. How different this is from the way that the Christians of old went on ! I have been told that, in their churches, the people answered AMEN so loud, that it was like a peal of thunder.

T. But do you think there is any occasion for us to make so much noise as that ?

W. I do not say there is ; but we should do it with a solemn and distinct voice, to show that we are not ashamed of what we are about, but that we really do all desire to offer up our prayers to God. The Rubric tells us, that, at the end of all the prayers, the *people* shall answer "*AMEN.*" Mind : not the *clerk* only, but the *people* too. Indeed, through all the Prayer Book, care is taken to remind us that prayer is a work in which we are *every one of us* concerned ; and that we are not to be content with bringing our bodies to the house of prayer, but that we are to bring our minds, and thoughts, and affections there too. Thus, when we say, "*Let us pray,*" this shows that prayer is not the business of the minister only, but of *us*—of every one of us.

T. Yes, and the Church, to be sure, does furnish us with prayers wonderfully suited to the wants and desires of Christians of all sorts and conditions.

W. Yes : if we attend well to the whole of the service we shall find it so. But now let us look

a little farther into the Prayer Book ; and let us begin where we left off last. I think, after the Lord's Prayer, these words come :

Priest. O Lord, open thou our lips.

Ans. And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

Priest. O God, make speed to save us.

Ans. O Lord, make haste to help us."

Yes, these little verses come next. We pray that the Lord would "open our lips." The gift of speech comes from *Him* : we cannot open our lips unless He gives us the power. It is but right, then, that if He gives us the gift of speech, we should employ it to his glory, and that "our mouth should show forth his praise." And then, as our help and salvation can only come from the Lord, we pray that He would "make speed to save us," and that He would "make haste to help us." Then, we are all to rise from our knees, and stand up : and, as soon as we are in that posture of praise, we all join in giving "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." And, as the faithful have, at all times, lifted up their praises to this ever-blessed Godhead, so they ever shall ; and the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost shall never fail ; "as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end." I remember a story of one of the godly men of old ; an aged, venerable man he was ; and he was called to shed his blood in the glorious cause of the Gospel. When he was tied to the stake, and was just going to be put to a cruel death, the Lord, who has promised never to leave or forsake his people, supported him in his last agonies. There was no murmur, no grief, at being called upon to suffer in the cause of his beloved Master ; but, in his last prayer, he blessed the Lord who had brought him to see that day, and that hour : and the last

words he spoke were, "Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

T. Pray, who was this good man, William? and how long ago did he live?

W. Oh, he lived a long time ago; he was alive at the time of the first Apostles of our Lord. His name was Polycarp. He was made a bishop by St. John himself, and had always great delight in talking over the sayings of that "disciple whom Jesus loved."

T. Well, the last words of his prayer certainly show us that the way in which we express the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is the way in which the first Christians did it. And we trust that "as it was in the beginning, and is now, so it ever shall be, world without end." But now let us see what comes next?

THE PSALMS.

W. Yes, but before we begin them, the minister says—"Praise ye the Lord:"—to which the people answer, "The Lord's name be praised." Now, these words are used to put us in mind that we are getting to that part of our worship which consists in *praising* the Lord. We have, already, confessed our sins, and come (if we have come aright) in sincere penitence to God, through a Saviour's all-atoning merits. For his pardoning mercy, and for *all* his mercies, we have need to "praise the Lord:" and the minister, therefore, calls upon us to do so: then rejoicing in the glorious work, we, one and all of us, exclaim, "The Lord's name be praised."—Then we begin to praise the Lord in those beautiful words of Scripture which are called "The Psalms." And here, too, we should seek to have our hearts and minds engaged in the service. In reading them, the

minister takes one verse, and the people another, and so we are all employed in the work of praise.

T. Yes, and very noble that does sound, if all the people join heartily and devoutly. But many poor creatures can't read, and so they can't join.

W. No, that's very true. But then, as the clerk generally leads the people, those who cannot read may still carry their minds along with the praises thus publicly offered,—if the clerk reads in a distinct and devout manner. However, I hope, if Sunday-schools and day-schools go on and prosper, our congregations will, in time, be able to read, and so all join in the service, and make it just what it ought to be, and what it was certainly intended to be.

T. And they tell me, that in many of these schools the children learn to *sing* too ; so that, in time, we may expect the whole congregation to join in singing the praises of God, instead of leaving this part of the service to only a few of the people, as is too much the way now-a-days. When a psalm is given out, the clerk says, "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God." This shows that we should all join if we can ; it is not, "Let us *listen* whilst *others* sing ;" but it is, "Let us *sing*."

W. To be sure : and, as God's goodness is shown to us all, we certainly ought, all of us, to join in showing forth his praise. It is true, that if we have never learned to sing, and never practised it, we shall not make much of it at first. At any rate, however, if we cannot join in the music, we can, as St. Paul says, "sing with the spirit, and with the understanding."*

T. Why, certainly : and thus we may all "sing unto the Lord, and heartily rejoice in the strength

* 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

of our salvation." These words, you know, come out of the 95th Psalm, and I have often thought how suitable it is for us to begin with this Psalm, as we do, before any of the rest. It seems to invite* us to the work of praise: to "come before his presence with thanksgiving, and show ourselves glad in Him with Psalms." It invites us likewise to prayer as well as praise: "to worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker."

W. Yes; and I have been told, that in ancient times they used to sing this Psalm before the service began: and thus all the people that were in the church by singing this together, invited those who were in the church-yard or about, to come in and join in prayer and praise. And some who were in bed, when they heard this invitation Psalm, would get up and make haste into church. In those days, you know, service began very early in the morning.

T. Well, I think that if Christians, in those days, could delight in getting up betimes, to pay in public their morning tribute of praise to Him who had preserved them in safety through the night, it is a sad thing to think of, that many, in these days, cannot get ready for morning church, when it does not begin till ten or eleven o'clock! —But let us go on to talk about the Psalms. I think I can see, in these Psalms, something suitable to every state of the heart, or of the circumstances. If we are cast down with affliction, or distress of body or mind, we can see that David, though a king, had his trials too; and we may learn from him where to look for help. If we are oppressed with the burden of our sins, we may learn how David mourned for his, and repented, and found mercy. If the Lord gives us repentance

* This was called the "Invitatory Psalm."

for sin, and "makes us glad with the joy of his countenance," we are taught to give praise to Him whose "mercy endureth for ever." In short, if any blessing is bestowed upon ourselves, or our fellow-creatures, we are taught in the Psalms, to "praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men." The Psalms seem suited both for public worship and private meditation, and we do well to take the Apostle's advice thus to admonish one another in Psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual songs."

W. Yes, certainly.—And these Psalms, we may observe, contain many things relating to our Saviour, who was to come into the world more than a thousand years after they were written: and thus, having the spirit of prophecy in them, they must be inspired. In former times people were not satisfied till they could repeat the whole book of Psalms by heart. Our blessed Lord, whilst He was upon earth, seemed to have a delight in these Psalms. When He hung upon the cross, He said a part of the 22nd, and died whilst repeating a part of the 31st. Thus He, who spake as never man spake, chose to conclude his life, to solace Himself in his greatest agony, and at last to breathe out his soul, in the Psalmist's words, rather than his own. There is a great deal, indeed, in these sacred hymns; they are full of instruction and of comfort. Here we see the blessings of religion; it was this which afforded delight to the Psalmist David, when all his earthly greatness could give him none:—and his beautiful Psalms offer the same comfort to others which they afforded to himself. Excellent, however, as these Psalms are, the Church does not stop here. We have other parts of Scripture read for our instruction. When we consider that there was a time when the Scriptures were not

allowed to be read at all in our language, what a blessing it is that these things are now open to us all ! We can read the Scriptures at home, and they are read to us in the church. There are always

TWO LESSONS

read to us as a part of the service : one out of the *Old Testament*, and one out of the *New* ; and by going to church twice every Sunday, we hear four chapters, besides the Psalms, and Epistles, and Gospels, and all those other portions which are to be found, in different parts, all over the Prayer Book. Why, I call this a noble Scriptural stock ! Surely we cannot be thankful enough for all these privileges ! With all these opportunities, it is a disgrace for a true churchman to be ignorant of the word of God. If we see our privileges, and rightly use them, we shall find great comfort, and improvement too, from what we hear. I have known many a man, and woman too, who could not read a letter of the book ; yet, by a constant attendance at church, they have arrived at a great acquaintance with Scripture, and have walked in its light : its threatenings have alarmed them from sin, its invitations have won them to godliness, and its promises have supported them in the day of trial and affliction : in the hour of death they have been supported by a reliance on that Saviour in whose merits the Church teaches them to confide ; and at the day of judgment we trust they will not be forsaken.

T. To be sure, to be sure, all these blessings may be got from the word of God. It is, indeed, a glorious privilege to hear so much of the glad tidings of salvation every time we go into the house of the Lord. But how little value do we often set upon those blessings which our heavenly

Father so mercifully bestows upon us ! How many people have I seen, in a place of worship, negligent and careless about all these "glad tidings ;" perhaps whispering and looking about them, whilst the minister was reading to them these "words of eternal life !"—Whilst God's messenger was declaring to them God's own words, they have turned a deaf ear, as if they would not be instructed ; as if, whilst their bodies were brought to the Lord's house, "their hearts were far from Him." Many, alas ! there are who act so foolish, so wicked a part ;—but, however, I need not talk about others, I have been guilty of this myself. It is not having the means of grace in our power that will lead us to heaven ; it is making use of them.

W. To be sure. Our Church, I say, offers us great privileges. It is a great privilege to have such large portions of Scripture read to us every time we go into the church ; yet this will avail us but little, if we do not give diligent heed to profit by what is read. If God has given us "ears to hear,—let us hear." Our Church teaches us to bless God that He hath given us the "Holy Scriptures for our learning ;" but she likewise teaches us to pray that He would enable us to "mark, learn, and inwardly digest them," for then comes the blessing to *ourselves*.—His "holy word" is indeed a "comfort" to us, if we "embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which He hath given us in our Lord Jesus Christ."* The Lord, by giving us the Scriptures, hath, indeed, "cast his bright beams of light upon the Church ;" but that Church teaches us to pray, "that we may be enlightened by the doctrine of his blessed Apostles, and so walk in the light of his truth,

* Second Sunday in Advent.

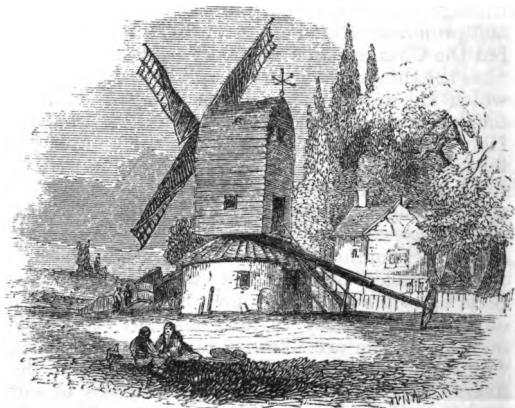
and at length attain to the light of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."* The commands and promises of God are given to us in the Bible, but the Church sends us to *Prayer* that we may "*love the things which He commands, and desire that which He doth promise.*"† God, *in former times*, taught his people "by sending them the light of his Holy Spirit" in a miraculous manner. *Now*, He teaches us by the ordinary method of his written word. But we have need of "the same Spirit," and are taught to pray for it, that we may "have a right judgment in all things; and evermore rejoice in his holy comfort."‡ Our Church teaches us that we are "called by God's holy word," but she directs us to pray that we may "forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil his holy commandments."§ We are likewise taught to pray that, "by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by the Apostles, all the diseases of our souls may be healed through the merits of Christ."|| Now, these prayers remind us of the blessing of having the Scriptures read to us: and they call upon us, in a particular manner, to seek for Divine help, that we may be enabled so to use our advantages, that the Scriptures may become the instruments of making us really "wise unto salvation."

* St. John the Evangelist. † Fourth Sunday after Easter.

‡ Whit-Sunday.

§ St. Andrew.

|| St. Luke.



CHAPTER VI.

TE DEUM.

Thomas. IN our last conversation, William, you talked to me about the *Lessons* that are read in the church, but you never said a word about the Hymn that comes directly *after the first Lesson*, nor of that which comes directly *after the second*.

William. Why, you know, Thomas, I did not undertake to enter into particulars about every part of the Prayer Book : it would take us a great deal of time to do that : it would take a very large book to hold all that might be said about the excellence of our Church service. There are many great and learned books on this subject, beyond

your reach and mine : I only tell you a few things in my poor way, just as they happen to strike me.

T. Well, I think the *Te Deum* (the hymn, I mean, that comes after the *first Lesson*) is one of the most beautiful and noble pieces I ever read in my life. Last Sunday I was listening very closely to the *first Lesson*, and hearing about the wonderful works of God, and all his mercies ; how the false gods of the heathens, and their worshippers, all fell, and became as nothing before the true God ; how the enemies of the Lord were all confounded, and how his faithful people ever experienced his favour and his care. When I heard of these things, my heart seemed to warm within me, and I thought we might well exclaim, "We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge *Thee* to be the Lord."

W. Yes ; these words come in wonderfully well just after hearing a chapter from the Old Testament. The *Te Deum* is, indeed, a noble hymn ; and a blessed thing it would be if we could all find our hearts expressing their praise to God in unison with these grand and solemn words. We find the "earth" and the "heavens," the "angels" and "Apostles," the "Cherubim and Seraphim," all joining in the praise of the "Lord God of Hosts." Then we acknowledge what "the holy Church throughout all the world" has ever acknowledged—"the Father of an infinite Majesty ;" his "honourable, true, and only Son," our blessed Redeemer ; and the "Holy Ghost," our "Comforter." Then we pray to the Lord, who hath "redeemed us with his most precious blood," that He would help us, and make us to be "numbered with his saints in glory everlasting." Well may we "magnify" Him "day by day," and "worship" Him "world without end." And, when we consider what poor creatures we are without his help,

well may we beg of Him to "keep us this day without sin." And when we think how often we offend, well may we plead for mercy: "O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us." And surely, if our trust is in Him, we shall find his mercy; if we can really from our hearts say, "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted," we may then rely humbly on the Gospel promises, that we shall "never be confounded."

T. Yes; all those parts of the *Te Deum* which you have mentioned, do, to be sure, express, in a beautiful way, the praise which it becomes us to offer to the Lord. But I see that there is, in the Prayer Book, another Hymn that may be read instead of the *Te Deum*; it is called

THE BENEDICTE.

W. Yes; this is the "Song of the Three Children." You remember how three young men of the Jews were thrust into a burning fiery furnace, because they would worship the true God, instead of the heathen idol which Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had set up.

T. Yes; these three men were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; they were in captivity in Babylon with the rest of the Jews, and they were to be burned for worshipping the true God. But they trusted in the Lord, and He kept them safe, and brought them out of this dreadful trial. These three men were all bound fast with chains, that there might not be a chance of their escaping out of the fire; but the Lord set them at liberty.

W. Yes; the king looked, and he saw *four* men, and they were all *loose*; the fire had no power to hurt them,—the Lord had delivered them: "the form of the fourth was like the Son of God." "They walked in the midst of the fire, praising

God, and blessing the Lord." The three, as out of one mouth, praised and glorified, and blessed God in the furnace; and they were believed by the Jews to have sung together this beautiful hymn: "O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever!" This is, indeed, a song of praise for us for ever; it calls upon every creature of every kind to give glory to God. For, whichever way we look, we see the goodness of the Lord around us; and, if we feel as we ought to do, it will be our desire and our delight to render unto Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise.

T. Well, these two Hymns do seem exactly proper to come after a Lesson from the Old Testament.

W. Yes; and the two which are chosen to come after the second Lesson are just as suitable.

THE BENEDICTUS

begins in this manner, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people." You remember, in the first chapter of St. Luke, the account of old Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. When John was circumcised, on the eighth day, the aged Zacharias was "filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied," and he uttered this song of praise for the Lord's mercies in *visiting* and *redeeming* his people.

T. Well, certainly then this must be well suited to come after the second Lesson, which, being out of the New Testament, declares to us the redeeming mercies of God in Christ. And I think the other Hymn likewise comes quite well in this place, and I think it is more commonly used; I mean that which begins, "O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands!"

W. Yes ; these beautiful words were sung by David. He delighted in the praise and worship of God, and he wished to see all mankind doing the same. He calls upon all "lands" to be "joyful in the Lord," and to serve Him with "gladness." And this does, indeed, truly belong to *Christian* worshippers. If David could rejoice and be glad in the Lord, and "come before his presence with a song" of triumph, much more ought *Christians* to "go into his courts with praise," to be "thankful unto Him, and to speak good of his Name ;" because *they* have all those blessings in *possession* which David could only look forward to with the eye of faith. The Lord's peculiar people *then* was only the nation of the Jews ; but our blessed Saviour commands his Gospel to be preached to *all the world*. Well, then, may we sing, "O be joyful in the Lord, *all ye lands!*"

T. To be sure, this does come exactly as it should do after the *second* Lesson, which is full of the glad tidings of salvation to *all people*.

W. Yes ; and if you look at the hymns which come after the lessons in the *Evening Service*, you will find them just as well suited to their purpose. But we should remember, that it is not sufficient for us to know that the Prayers, and Hymns, and Psalms, and Lessons, are all suitable, and excellent, and beautiful ; we should be very desirous and anxious to have our minds and thoughts fixed upon what we are doing. If we only use the words, without thinking what we are about, this is nothing but "vain babbling ;" but, if our hearts go along with us whilst we repeat the beautiful words which the Church appoints, surely the Lord will bless us, and make our prayers an instrument of spiritual good to us. Thus, when we come to the

MAGNIFICAT,

and say, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour," we should earnestly desire that *our* soul may magnify the Lord, and that we may truly "rejoice in God our Saviour," that we may be sincerely thankful that He hath wrought out salvation for his people ; and that, through his grace, our hearts, and lives, and tempers, and behaviour, may be a preparation for that heavenly kingdom which He has provided for them that love Him and obey Him. This is the Hymn which the Virgin Mary sang, rejoicing that a Saviour was to be born ; but the blessing of redemption is to us and to our children : it becomes us, therefore, still to pour forth the same praises. The Lord, "remembering his mercy, hath holpen his servant Israel:" but all true believers in Christ are now the Lord's people, "the Israel of God ;" let us, therefore, rejoice and be glad, and let *our* souls, too, "magnify the Lord."

T. It surely ought to be so as much now as ever. But let us see what comes after the second Lesson in the Evening Service.

W. It is the

NUNC DIMITTIS.

This was the song of the aged Simeon. This ancient saint waited to see the day of the Lord ; and he saw it, and was then willing to "depart in peace:" he took the blessed Infant Jesus in his arms, and joyfully exclaimed, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation !" He speaks of this salvation as "prepared before the face of *all* people." It does not, like the privileges of old, belong to Jews only ; it is "a light to lighten the *Gentiles*,"

as well as a "glory of *thy people Israel*." Let it be our desire to walk in that light, to lay aside all works of darkness and wickedness ; that the light of the Gospel may lighten us Gentiles to glory.

T. To be sure, that should be our desire. It certainly is a great blessing to have the Lord's will made known to us in his holy word ; but it is of little use to us to have the light of the Gospel if we do not seek to walk in that light. It is sad, indeed, to have light offered to us, and yet for us to "love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil." If we love to continue in sin, we certainly shall never love the Gospel of Christ, because it is all throughout so directly contrary to sin. Let us now, however, if you please, go on to consider what comes next in the Prayer Book. I see that there are some other verses which may be read instead of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis*. One begins, "O sing unto the Lord a new song ;" and the other, "God be merciful unto us."

W. Yes ; one is the 98th Psalm and the other the 67th. But I think the two others which we have been speaking of are the oftenest used, and therefore we have talked more particularly about them.

T. Why, to be sure ; if we were to enter particularly into every part of the book, it would take us a longer time than we can well spare at present. These things are all beautiful ; they all come out of the Scripture. And if we have not time to *talk* about all these things when we are *together*, we may *think* about them when we are *alone*. I often, now, consider over a verse of Scripture when I am sitting by myself or lying in bed ; it is a great comfort to me, and I find it a great safeguard. It

is wonderful to think what a great deal there is in a verse of the Bible, if it is considered over well ; and what a great blessing it is, that our Prayer Book should be so very much of it out of the Bible ; because, hearing it every time we go to church, we soon get to know it almost all by heart, and have our minds thus stored with so many texts of Scripture.

W. Yes, this is the great blessing of the Prayer Book, that it is so truly *Scripture*.

THE APOSTLES' CREED.

The *Belief*, or what is called the *Apostles' Creed*, is the next part of the service. I do delight in hearing a whole congregation thus declaring their faith in those glorious truths which are set forth in the Gospel : and whilst we thus declare our *belief*, we all stand up, as if to show that we are not ashamed of our profession, but that it is our glory to declare that we look to God as our Father, to Christ as our Redeemer, and to the Holy Ghost as our Sanctifier. And this is of very great use, too ; for, when the Christian's faith in the Holy Trinity is obliged to be openly declared by us, this must keep the doctrine of the Church from going to decay, by constantly reminding us what it is.

T. Yes, this is certainly a great matter. But yet it is an easy thing for a man to "*say* that he hath faith," and so to repeat the Creed with his lips, without having any of these Gospel truths written on his heart.

W. Yes, indeed it is ; but yet I should hope that every member of the Church believes the doctrines which he professes, and in which he was baptized. To have a *living* faith in these things is indeed what we ought to seek for ; to have

D

the heart and the conduct moved and influenced by them. This is a great subject for prayer ; and our Church teaches us constantly to pray for this very thing. We ask of the Lord, that, as He hath taught us the "confession of a true faith, He would keep us *stedfast* in the same." Now, though confession with the lips will not make us *stedfast* in the faith, yet we must know what the true faith is before we can be *stedfast* in it ; and repeating the words must be of great use in keeping the truth in our minds. This seemed so needful to some of the holy Fathers of old, that they thought it proper that this Creed should be repeated every night and morning.

T. Well, and I know many persons, now-a-days, that use it every night and morning for one of their prayers ; but I never could see that this was a *prayer*, and, therefore, I think it ought not to be used for one.

W. Why, certainly not. This is a great mistake. The Belief is a confession of the true faith, and, therefore, quite proper to be used in the public worship of the Church, by all who would profess that they believe in the truths of the Gospel : and it is right for us to teach it to our children, that they may know what they ought to believe ; but they are not to offer up the Creed as a prayer, because it is not a prayer, for there is not a single petition in it. It is true, that as it is our duty to declare in public what we believe, so it is our duty to pray that our faith may not be barren ; but that it may bring forth fruit ; that the Lord may make us true believers ; that He would graft these fruits in our hearts, that they may lead us to real godliness here, and to eternal glory hereafter. And it seems to me that the prayers in our books are made in this very spirit.

T. I think so too. To be sure, though we ought to have a right faith, and to understand clearly what is the true doctrine of the Scripture ; and though we ought all boldly and publicly to declare that such is the faith we would live and die in ; yet, if the effect of this do not appear in the amendment of the heart and the improvement of the conduct, it is no better than a dead faith, such as the devils have,—who believe and tremble.

W. Very true, Thomas : a living faith is what we ought to pray for : and if the Lord be with us, to help us, we may hope for this blessing on our prayers ; and for this reason, as soon as we have finished the *Belief*, and are going to prayers, the Rubric, I see, bids us to be "*all devoutly kneeling*." But the minister first begs the Lord's blessing on the people—

"The Lord be with you."

And all the people then beg that the Lord would be with their minister,

"And with thy spirit."

Then they all go to prayers, the minister first saying,

"Let us pray."

After being thus called upon to pray, we say,

"Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Lord, have mercy upon us."

T. It seems to me that these *three* petitions come in exactly right here, because we have just been confessing our belief in the *three* Persons of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost

W. Yes, this is exactly so. I have, however, sometimes heard the clerk and the people say, *Lord, have mercy upon us*, again ; thus making *four* petitions.

T. Yes, and so have I ; but this must be wrong ; and, to be sure, as we have seen that such great pains were taken to make the service of the Church as good as possible, and since it was done by men who understood the thing so well, it seems a pity to add anything to it : for we shall only stand a chance of making it *worse*, after all.

W. To be sure.—But let us go on. The next thing in the service is *The Lord's Prayer*. We have here the privilege of again offering up the petitions conveyed in this prayer ; and, as these petitions contain the very life and soul of religion, we should always offer them up with real earnestness, and with a sincere desire after those things which we ask for, and which the Lord has promised to the prayers of his people. But as we have already conversed on *The Lord's Prayer*, we had better now go on to what follows.

T. Well, I see that some *sentences* follow ; and it is a great delight to hear the Priest and the People lifting up their voices by turns, expressing their dependence upon God, and asking for his blessing on themselves and their fellow-creatures. And I think that in these

SENTENCES

I can again see Scripture throughout.

W. Yes, they are chiefly taken from the Psalms. In the first of these we beg of the Lord to show his “mercy upon us.” This is the real spirit of prayer. We are sinners, and “mercy” is what we stand in need of. Our Prayer Book, you see, *will* keep to Scripture, and *will* require us to confess ourselves “miserable sinners,” who, without Divine mercy, must be lost.

T. Yes, and salvation must be the Lord's gift ; and we therefore next beg of Him to “grant us his salvation.”

W. And then we pray to the Lord to "save the Queen." It is our duty to pray for the Queen. It is "by the Lord that kings reign." And, if we beg the Lord's blessing upon those who are appointed to rule over us, we may hope that their reigns will be prosperous and happy; that they will be able so to rule, that peace and true godliness may flourish and prevail, and convince us all how highly favoured is that land which is governed by a Christian sovereign. Then we pray for the Lord's ministers, the teachers of religion, and for the people too. I am sure we ought to pray for our ministers, who are appointed to watch over our souls; theirs is, indeed, a hard task, and often a very unthankful office. How often are we angry with them when they are most true to their duty, by telling us of our faults! and how often, through our carelessness or obstinacy, is all their good advice thrown away upon us! This must be a great grief to a faithful minister, and be apt to cast him down and discourage him; he knows, however, where to look for support,—and he will find it; but still we ought all to join in prayer that the Lord would "endue his ministers with righteousness," and give a blessing to their labours; and, if ministers and people did join heartily in prayer for one another,—if pious teachers met with the cordial assistance and prayers of their flocks, and both of them thus endeavoured to promote the work of the Lord,—we should soon see the blessing of it, in the happiness and comfort of every place where the Christian religion thus prevailed; we should cheer and assist one another in our journey through this world, and should go to the blessed seats of heavenly happiness together, and be there bid to "enter into the joy of our Lord."

Yes, my friend, I am sure we ought to pray for

our ministers : and our Church very justly requires us to do so. But she goes on further, begging the Lord to make his "chosen people joyful,"—"to save his people,"—"to bless his inheritance,"—and to "give us peace." Then we finish these short prayers with this important request, that the Lord would "make our hearts clean within us." If our hearts be clean, then our conduct will be pure and holy : and our words and thoughts, too, will be according to godliness. But we cannot cleanse our own hearts, and we can never have them right without the special grace of God, which, as our Catechism says, "we must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer : " we therefore ask that the " Lord would not take his Holy Spirit from us ; " that He would not leave us a moment to ourselves, but that He would support us constantly by that heavenly grace which alone can keep us from falling.

T. Yes, this is exactly so. If we really think what we are about when we are in the church, there are words to express everything we would ask for. I have found this very particularly in

THE COLLECTS.

What beautiful prayers these are ! They seem to express all the wishes and feelings we ought to have. There is sorrow for sin, and prayer for pardon ; trust in the death and merits of our Redeemer ; and earnest entreaty that we may be daily renewed by the Holy Spirit, so that we may be enabled "plenteously to bring forth the fruit of good works," not for the praise of men, but that "of *the Lord* we may be plenteously rewarded." I have found wonderful comfort, as well as instruction, from these Collects. You and I have already said a good deal about them in the course

of our conversation, and therefore we need say the less now : but I can truly declare, that I have found them to express just what I wished to say at church ; and not only so, but I have found them to assist me greatly when I am praying by myself at home, or when we are all together in family prayer.

W. Oh then, you have begun with family prayer. I am very glad to hear it. There are several good books suited for that purpose ; but, as you say, it would be a hard matter to find any better than our own.

T. I assure you I find it so. However, I sometimes use other good books at family prayer. It makes a variety in the expressions, and so, perhaps, leads us to be more attentive.

W. It may be so. In the church it is needful that we should keep to the same form of words, for many excellent reasons ; but it is not so necessary out of the church ; and, therefore, many good books have been put together for our assistance at home ; but, as you say, we shall find few that contain more of the real spirit of the Gospel than those of our Church, if we had but the grace to see it.

T. True ; and, if we look well into these Collects that we are speaking of, we cannot help seeing how beautiful they are, and how full of petitions for those things which we must always be wishing to ask for. I do not, however, desire that you should tell me any more about these collects now, because it would take us too long. But did you never observe what excellent Collects those are that come after the Collect for the day ? Our little girl learned these Collects at school, and when she came home at night she taught them to her mother and me. I verily believe that this has been a great

help to us in the way of religion. When the little creature told us that the boys and girls always went to prayers at school, both night and morning, we could not help seeing that this was a heavenly way of bringing up children, and a way on which we might expect a blessing. And we then considered that, if children were taught to pray, it was not that they might leave it off again when they should grow up. Then we began to see that we ourselves had need of prayers: and our little girl repeated to us those Collects which she had learned at school; and we found in them just *what* we wanted to ask for, and we were taught, too, *how* we ought to ask.

W. Exactly so: in

THE SECOND COLLECT, FOR PEACE,

we learn that God is "the Author of peace and lover of concord;" we learn that to *know* Him is "eternal life," and that to *serve* Him is "perfect freedom." But we know that the enemies of our souls are ever on the watch to take away from us this our eternal life, and to deprive us of this our perfect freedom; we therefore beg of the Lord that He would defend us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies, and give us that "sure trust in his defence," that we "need not fear the power of any adversary;" and we see *why* we need not fear *that* power, because we are defended by a *greater*—even the "*might* of Jesus Christ our Lord."—Then there is

THE THIRD COLLECT, FOR GRACE.

What a beautiful morning prayer that is! What a blessing it is to think that, whilst we have been asleep and unable to protect ourselves, we have

been defended, and "safely brought to the beginning of another day," by a "heavenly Father, an Almighty and everlasting God!" And then, by thinking of his past care, we are emboldened to ask for more mercies, and to beg that He would keep us during the day "from all sin, and from every kind of danger." To be sure, we are in danger every moment, and it is the Lord alone who keeps us from harm: and, if we know ourselves, we must be sensible that we are constantly liable to fall into sin; it is the Lord only who can uphold us. Well, then, do we ask Him to keep us "from all sin," and "from every kind of danger," and "that all our doings may be ordered by his governance," that we may thus be enabled to "do always such things as are righteous in his sight!" Again, in

THE SECOND COLLECT AT EVENING PRAYER,

we are reminded that every good thing comes from God. We can neither think nor do what is good but through Him: we are, therefore, taught to pray to *Him* "from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed." We are taught, likewise, where to look for true happiness and peace. The servants of God, therefore, pray that the Lord would give them "that peace which the world cannot give." This is to be found only in a trust and dependence on God; we, therefore, beg that the Lord would give us this true principle of religion, "that our hearts may be set to obey his commandments." And, if we are indeed desirous of performing the *duties* of religion, we may be allowed to ask for its *comforts*; we therefore go on to pray that we may be "defended from the fear of our enemies, and may pass our time in rest and quietness." And, as Christ purchased

this peace, and left it as a legacy to his servants, we beg for this blessing "through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour."

Then we have

THE THIRD COLLECT AT EVENING PRAYER.

When the darkness of night comes on, and when all our strength is about to be laid asleep ; when we are thus plainly taught that we have " no power of ourselves to help ourselves," what a blessing and a comfort it is to be able to commit ourselves to the care of that Almighty Guardian " who neither slumbers nor sleeps," and to beg of Him that He would " defend us from all the perils and dangers of the night !" And when we say, " Lighten our darkness," we should think of that darkness which is in our minds, and pray that God would enlighten us more and more, that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If a man knows nothing about the religion of Christ, he is still in *darkness* ; and if, indeed, he knows *something* of the Gospel, it should be his work to seek for *more* knowledge. The more a man knows, the more humble and the more teachable he will be. He will wish for more light. The best of us, then, as well as the worst, may devoutly pray, "Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord !"

T. Indeed we may ; and this prayer will do either when we are at church, or at home with our families, or by ourselves.





CHAPTER VII.

WHEN THEY NEXT MET, THOMAS THUS BEGAN
THE CONVERSATION.

Thomas. I SEE, William, that just after the Collect there are several prayers, which are not always read. There is a "Prayer for the Queen," another for the "Royal Family," and another for the "People." Why are not these prayers *always* read?

· *William.* Because, you know, that in the *Litany* we pray for the Queen, and the Royal Family, and the People. We, therefore, need not use these prayers at times when the *Litany* is appointed to be read.

T. Very true. The Church, however, takes care that such petitions, in one shape or other, shall always be offered up: and I am sure it ought to be so. When there is a good Christian King or Queen, what a noble example this affords to the people! what an encouragement to religion! We may indeed expect the Lord's blessing upon the people that are in such a case." But every good gift cometh from above, and is promised to our prayers. Surely, then, we ought to beg the Lord's blessing on our Queen; and, in

THE PRAYER FOR THE QUEEN'S MAJESTY,

we beg for the greatest of blessings. But first we acknowledge our "heavenly, our high and mighty Father," as the "King of kings, and Lord of lords, the only Ruler of princes," who sitteth upon his throne in heaven, and sees all of us who "dwell upon earth." Then we beg of Him that He would give these mightiest of all blessings to our gracious Queen; that he would fill "her with the grace of his Holy Spirit," so as to make her "always incline to *his* will, and walk in *his* ways." We beg of the Lord to send her abundance of heavenly gifts, that, after a long life of health and prosperity and success, she may, when her earthly warfare is over, be admitted through the merits of Christ into a kingdom of never-ending happiness and joy.

Then we offer up

A PRAYER FOR THE ROYAL FAMILY.

In this we ask for the choicest of blessings ; for surely every good wish is included in these words: "Endue them with thy *Holy Spirit* ; enrich them with thy *heavenly grace* ; prosper them with all *happiness*, and bring them to thine everlasting *kingdom*, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Then follows

A PRAYER FOR THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE.

It is a great blessing for us that we have ministers appointed to watch over our spiritual concerns, to pray with us, and to instruct us. It is an awful work to which they are ordained, "to watch for our souls, as they that must give an account." I am sure, then, we have all need to offer up our prayers for our ministers, and beg of the Lord so to bless their labours, that they may be enabled to render up their accounts "with joy and not with grief." And surely we, who are hearers of the word, ought to be thankful for our privileges ; and we ought to endeavour to strengthen the hands of our ministers, by endeavouring to do such things as they teach us out of the Scriptures. But, as all good desires and endeavours are the gifts of God, we ask that he would "send upon our Bishops and Curates, and all congregations committed to their charge, the healthful spirit of his grace !"

We seem, indeed, in this prayer to ask for everything that is good ; even that the Lord would send on the Bishops, the Ministers, and the People, "the continual dew of his blessing." And we do not ask for our own praise and glory, but "for the honour of our Advocate and Mediator Jesus Christ our Lord."

E

W. And after this prayer is finished, we have

A PRAYER FOR THE HIGH COURT OF PARLIAMENT.

We know that kingdoms cannot prosper without the Lord's blessing upon them. Our rulers and governors may plan and contrive ; but what will all this come to unless the Lord bless their endeavours ? The Bible says, "Blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God." A *religious* nation must be a *happy* nation. People may talk as they will, but the more I think of it, the more certain I feel, that if Christ's religion is made the groundwork of all we do, this is the true way to arrive at as much happiness as this world can give ; and we know, moreover, that it is the way to everlasting happiness when this world has passed away. If, then, the Lord blesses the counsels of those who make our laws ; if He fills their hearts with a real love for religion ; if He "be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations," so that they shall make "the advancement of God's glory," and "the good of Christ's Church," their great object and desire : then, built upon this "best and surest foundation," we shall see our nation truly great ; we shall have a real provision for "the safety, honour, and welfare of our sovereign and her dominions : " and we shall have the best reason to hope that "peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations." These are just the blessings we ought to pray for ; and in this prayer we ask for them, in the name and through the mediation of Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord and Saviour.

T. Yes, we see what is the true spirit of our Church. We are taught and required to pray for

all ; to beg the Lord's blessing upon the endeavours of every one.

W. Yes ; and that none may be left out, we have a

PRAYER FOR ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN.

T. Yes, a noble one it is !

W. It is indeed. We first address the Lord as our "Creator." He made us of His own free-will and goodness ; He formed us out of nothing. Let us, then, thankfully acknowledge him as our "Creator." It is *He*, moreover, who takes care of us every moment of our lives, and preserves us from a thousand accidents to which we are every instant exposed. Well therefore may we acknowledge Him as our "Preserver."

His care extends to *all* men. Well may we, therefore, address Him as "Creator and Preserver of *all mankind* ;" and we beg that He would bestow on them these best of gifts, teaching them "the knowledge of his ways," and blessing them with "the health of this salvation." And though we beg this blessing upon all nations, yet we pray "more especially for the good estate," the prosperity of those who are our brethren in the faith, belong to the body of Christians, the "Catholic Church."

T. Pray what do you mean by "*Catholic* ?"

W. It means *general, universal*. By the "Catholic Church" we mean the *Universal Church of Christ* ; all Christians in every part of the world. And how glorious are those gifts which our Church directs us to ask for all our fellow-Christians ! "that they may be guided and governed by God's good Spirit ;" that they may not be contented with the mere name of Believers ; but that "all who *profess and call themselves Christians*," may walk

worthy of their calling and profession, that they "may be led into the way of truth." Then we pray that those who hold the same "*faith*" may have, likewise, a "*unity of spirit*:" that we may all thus be yoked together, in the "bond of peace," and adorn the doctrine of our Saviour by "righteousness of life." Then, finally, we commend to the Lord's "fatherly goodness," all those who are in distress and affliction, whether of mind, or body, or worldly circumstances. We entreat of the Lord to "comfort and relieve them according to their several necessities:" that He would bless them with "patience under their sufferings," and give them "a happy deliverance out of their afflictions." We commit them to the Lord, desiring that "his will may be done;" praying that, if He takes them away, He will take them to Himself; or, if He sees fit to restore them, their affliction may have been blessed to the good of their souls; so that, in either case, it will "be a happy issue out of all their afflictions." We beg this blessing, like every other, for Jesus Christ's sake.

T. There cannot be a doubt as to the duty of praying for one another, because the Scriptures command it. And the prayer we have been talking of is full of every good wish. But now there is another thing that must come into our minds if we think as we ought to do: I mean, the consideration of all the blessings, and mercies, and favours, we are *every day*—I may say, *every hour*—receiving from our heavenly Father's bounty. Now, how apt are we to forget these great and many instances of the Lord's goodness to us! We are too often, like the ten poor lepers in the Gospel, who in their distress and affliction cried unto the Lord, and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us:" but when the Lord mercifully heard their prayer, and healed them,

there was only one among them all who came and returned thanks.

W. It is too true, neighbour. But our Church calls upon us to be *thankful*: and furnishes us with words of *thanksgiving* as well as *prayer*. We have

A GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

If any persons be kept away from church by sickness, the congregation will offer up their prayers for them: this is provided for in the *Prayer for all Sorts and Conditions of Men*. And if, through the mercy of God, those who are sick should be restored to health, they ought to avow publicly, before the same congregation, their thankfulness to God who hath heard their prayers. But, besides these particular instances of mercy, we have all of us, every hour, reason to praise the Lord, "the Father of all mercies," "for all his goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men." I think the true spirit of the Gospel is to be seen in the words of the "General Thanksgiving." We thank the Lord for *creating* us, and for *preserving* us: great and mighty instances of his goodness! but since man by sin fell from God, and lost his hopes of happiness, nothing but the *redeeming* mercy of the Lord could have given us any prospect of salvation. We therefore praise the Lord, "above all," for his "inestimable love in the *redemption* of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ." But yet, since even heaven itself, though the doors are opened by Christ, affords no entrance to those who are unprepared for it, our work is to seek to be holy, and watchful, and obedient: we therefore thank the Lord for giving us the "means of grace," to fit us for our eternal home, and for the "hopes of glory" held out to us, if we *use* those "means of grace." The mercy of God is, in every way, great. We are in

a sad state of preparation if we cannot see that : we beg, therefore, of the Lord, that He would "give us that due sense of all his mercies." It is easy to use a *form* of thankfulness : but in this prayer we ask that our *hearts* may "be unfeignedly thankful." It is easy to speak the words of thanksgiving with our lips ; but this prayer, like the Gospel, teaches us to ask that we may show forth the praise of the Lord, not "with our *lips* only, but in our *lives* : that we may give up ourselves to his service, and walk before Him in holiness and righteousness all our days." We ask all these blessings through Jesus Christ ; and "to Him, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost," we ascribe all "honour and glory, world without end."

T. To be sure, when we consider the great blessings we are constantly receiving from our heavenly Father, it is impossible to be thankful enough. It would have been a sad neglect if we had had no words in our book to express our thankfulness ; and surely no words can do it better than those we have. I wish we may be enabled to show forth our thanks by joining sincerely in the *words*, and that we may likewise show our real thankfulness by the holiness of our lives. But let us go on.

After the General Thanksgiving there follows a beautiful prayer, called

THE PRAYER OF ST. CHRYSOSTOM.

I observe that in every other prayer of the Church we offer up our petitions through Jesus Christ : but in this prayer we do not. How is this ?

W. Why, if you consider, you will see that this prayer is offered to Christ Himself, directly to *Him*. He has promised to be with us whenever we meet together to worship : "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," says our Saviour,

"there am I in the midst of them." We ask that the Lord would now fulfil his promise. The Lord, however, knows best what is good for his people; we beg of Him, therefore, to fulfil our desires and petitions in the way in which He knows to be best (most expedient) for us. But still we urge Him to give us these two things—"knowledge of his truth" *here*, and "life everlasting" *hereafter*.

T. The two greatest blessings we can ask for. But what a privilege it is for us to be assured, that when we meet together to worship, our Lord is really in the midst of us to hear our requests! How solemnly attentive this consideration ought to make us!

W. Indeed it ought. And how solemn, too, is that short prayer which ends this part of the service: it is in St. Paul's own words, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore.*"

Here, we seem to pray to the eternal Godhead, and to ask for those same mighty blessings which, in times of old, the Apostle begged for his converts and for himself—blessings which the Church of Christ must ever crave, *without* which Christians cannot live; and *with* which they shall never die. For *without* the "grace of Christ," "the love of God," and "the communion of the Holy Ghost," whosoever liveth is counted dead before God; and, *with* these, we cannot die eternally.

Here Thomas and William parted for the present. When they next met, their conversation proceeded as follows.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE LITANY.

Thomas. You and I, William, have often discoursed about different parts of the Prayer Book, but we have never yet said a word about the *Litany*.

William. I think I am as much struck with the *Litany* as with any part of the Book. It is, indeed, a grand and solemn address, or *supplication*, to the Almighty.

T. Yes; and how nobly it opens! A devout petition to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, to "have mercy upon us, miserable sinners."

When we think of what has been done for us, and of what manner of persons we *ought* to be, and then think of what we *are*, we may, indeed, truly confess ourselves to be "miserable sinners." And as we cannot undo or remove from us the guilt of one single sin, we have nothing left but to cry for mercy. We have sinned against our *heavenly Father*. It is through the atoning blood of the *Son* alone that our sins can be blotted out. And it is through the *Holy Ghost* alone that we can be renewed to holiness, and made fit objects of God's mercy. Well may we, therefore, pray to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, "three persons and one God," to "have mercy upon us, miserable sinners." Then we beg of the Lord, that He would remove from us that anger which our sins have justly deserved: and we plead with Him "to spare his people whom He hath redeemed with his most precious blood." "Spare us, good Lord."

But what sins and temptations we are exposed to in this world!—what "blindness of heart,"—what "pride,"—what "vain-glory and uncharitableness,"—what "envy, hatred, and malice,"—what "deadly sins,"—what "deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil,"—what quarrels and "schisms,"—what accidents "from lightning and tempest,"—what sickness "from plagues, pestilence, and famine,"—what awful and alarming "murders,"—what "sudden deaths!" Well, then, may we pray that God would deliver us from these.

W. Yes, and well may we entreat of the Lord "by his holy incarnation, his cross, and passion, his precious death and burial, his glorious resurrection and ascension, and by the coming of the Holy Ghost," that He would "have mercy upon us." We need his mercy to keep us from the

dangers both of prosperity and adversity :—"in all time of our *tribulation*, and in all time of our *wealth*." And the very thought of "the hour of death," and the "day of judgment," constrains us to cry, "Good Lord, deliver us !"

Then we offer up our *intercession* for others. And in doing this, we do not presume to take to ourselves any higher title than that of *sinner*s. "We *sinner*s do beseech Thee to hear us, O Lord God !"

T. How solemn and affecting it is, to hear all the people, after every request, crying unto the Lord, and saying, "We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord !"

W. Yes ; this is wonderfully animating. And the Lord will hear us, if we call upon Him with all our hearts, and if we ask such things as are according to his word. And here I think we do. We beg a blessing upon the Christian Church ;—we pray for the Queen,—for the Royal Family,—for the Ministers of religion,—for the Nobility, the Magistrates, and the People. We pray likewise for all nations, that the Lord would send them the blessings of "unity, peace, and concord." Then we ask of the Lord to give us that which is the sum of all that is good—"a heart to love Him, to serve Him, and diligently to live after his commandments." Then, what a heavenly prayer that is for every one of us who hears the preaching of the word,—a prayer that God would give us "increase of grace,"—that we may hear the word "*meekly*:" not with a desire to *cavil* or *object*, or *criticise*, but "with *pure affection*,"—a sincere love of it,—a desire to have the heart and mind so affected by it that we may bring forth the "fruits of the Spirit,"—Christian dispositions—Christian lives !

T. Yes ; this must be the way to hear the word. What profit can it be to us to be told of the mercies

of God, if we do not seek to be partakers of them ? Of what use can it be for us to hear the sound of instruction, if we do not strive to be the better for it ? What good can it do us to attend the preaching of the word, if we only go to find objections and fault, instead of going with a meek desire to know and to love the truth.

W. No ; we are in a sad mistake, and in a most dangerous error, if we fancy that it is enough to hear the word, whilst, all the time, we are determined to go on in our negligence and wicked practices. We are, however, taught to pray for those who thus deceive themselves ; and we beseech the Lord, that it would please Him to bring into the way of truth all such as have *erred* and *are deceived*.

T. Yes ; and we pray earnestly to the Lord, that He will keep us from such dangers. And even if we are in the right way, we have need of the strength of the Lord to keep us so :—and we should beg this blessing on our fellow-Christians too. We should beg that the Lord would “strengthen such as *do stand*,”—“that He would help the weak-hearted,”—“raise up them that fall,” and finally “beat down Satan,” the enemy of our souls, “under our feet.”

W. Yes ; and then we pray for those who are in “danger” and “affliction,”—for those whom duty or necessity compels to be on their travels “by land or by water”—for sorrowing “women,” and feeble “children”—for those who are confined in prisons, and all such as cannot enjoy the blessed privilege of coming to church and praying for themselves. Then we beg of the Lord to help the “fatherless and the widow,” and that He would “have mercy upon all men.” Then we offer that *Christian* prayer, “that He would forgive our

enemies," and those who persecute us and speak evil of us.

T. What a blessing it is that we have the religion of the Gospel to teach us ! I know, if I was left to my own feelings, I should wish to be revenged on my enemies, to have them suffer and brought into trouble for the injuries they have contrived against me.

W. Yes, I am afraid this would be the way with us all ; and it is still the way with those who do not take the word of God for their guide. But the Gospel teaches us a better lesson, and bids us pray to the Lord to "*forgive* our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts."

After this we come to a *supplication*, that the Lord would take care of the produce of the earth for us, so that we may have corn, and fruit, and herbs, and all such things as He knows to be needful for us, at their proper seasons. And we conclude our supplications with begging of the Lord that it would please Him to give us that which we know we all want—"true repentance" for all our past sins :—that, when we sincerely repent, He would entirely forgive. We all have sins to repent of. Too many of us have been guilty of *presumptuous sins*, besides our sins of "negligence and ignorance." Through the atonement made by Christ, we ask forgiveness. But if we hope to be accepted, we must not stop here, but seek to lead the rest of our lives in obedience to the will of God. We therefore beg of the Lord "to endue us with the grace of his Holy Spirit, to amend our lives according to his holy Word."

To these supplications we may all add this fervent petition,—“We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord.” We may truly pray to our blessed Saviour, and say, “Son of God, we beseech Thee

to hear us." And as we *began* pleading for *mercy*, so we *end*. We pray to the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world," to "grant us his peace," and to "have mercy upon us ;"—*mercy* still being our petition.

"Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Lord, have mercy upon us."

T. Well, it is wonderful how exactly suited these prayers are to our wants. Why, the Litany seems to be full of Gospel prayer, in its real spirit. Indeed, all the prayers in the book are so full of what is good, that I grieve to think that I never gave them such consideration before. There is, however, one question that I should like to ask you now, whilst I think of it. Pray what do you think is the meaning of

"O Lord, deal not with us *after* our sins :

Neither reward us *after* our iniquities ?"

We cannot mean to beg that the Lord would have nothing to do with us *after* we have committed sin, and that He would never reward us *after* we have done iniquity.

W. No, it does not mean *that* ; for that would be praying against ourselves. We mean to confess that we have been guilty of sins and iniquities ; and, if the Lord were to deal with us according to our deservings, we should be justly punished ; if He were to give us such rewards—such wages—as our iniquities deserved, we must perish ; for "the wages of sin is death." We therefore plead for *mercy*, and beg of Him that He would not punish us *according* to our sins, nor reward us *according* to our iniquities.

T. I see it. *After* is a word which in old times, I suppose, meant *according* to.

W. Yes.

T. I think, neighbour, we shall not have occasion to go much further into the Church service, as I think I now begin to understand, pretty well, the meaning of it. There is a wonderful deal in those prayers that we have been considering, and I dare say I shall find it so with the rest, when I come to look over them at home. There is, however, one part that strikes me greatly ; that is

THE COMMUNION SERVICE.

How solemn it is to hear the Priest from the Lord's table, praying in the Lord's own words ! It is a grand opening to this part of the service, and truly suited to that most sacred place.

W. Yes : nothing could be more so. And then, what a beautiful Collect is that which follows the Lord's Prayer ! How awful it is for us to look upon our "Almighty God" as a Being unto whom "all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." But when we rightly consider this, we must see that we are wholly unfit to have the pure eye of God looking into our "hearts," our "desires," and our "secret" thoughts : we therefore humbly beseech Him to "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit." It is by this renewal of the Holy Spirit alone that we can ever hope "perfectly to love the Lord," or "worthily to magnify his holy name."

T. Yes ; this prayer shows us our own weakness ; but it shows us, to our comfort, where is our strength. I think, when we examine our own hearts, we cannot help despairing of ever arriving at this "perfect love." There is one thing, however, we know, which is, that it is our business to be always seeking to do the will of God, and to keep his commandments. Our Saviour says, "If

ye love me keep my commandments." Now, nobody in our Church can say that he does not know what God's commandments are, for they are constantly declared to us all by the ministers of the Lord. And how awakening it is to our attention to be solemnly told, that "GOD spake these words!"

W. Yes: *this* will make us listen, if *anything* will. And when we hear these Commandments and know their meaning, we cannot help seeing how many times we have broken them. And then when we consider that we cannot atone for one of our past sins, that we cannot undo one of them, well may we cry, at the end of every Commandment, "Lord, have mercy upon us." And here again we are led to see the blessing of the Gospel. Here are our hopes, and here is our comfort. For here we find that our blessed Saviour has made atonement for our sins; that since *we* could do *nothing* towards procuring our pardon, *He*, by paying the penalty, has done all.

T. They tell me, William, that there are some *unbelievers* in these days, who write against the Gospel, and who tell us that there is no truth, and no use in it. Now, for my part, whichever way I look at it, it seems to me to be *all* truth; and I feel quite sure of this, that I can have no hope without it. But, on the other hand, for fear we should think that we may so depend upon pardoning mercy, as to be encouraged to go on in sin; for fear we should ever suppose that we can be excused from keeping God's law, our Church instantly stops that plea, by teaching us to beg of the Lord, after every Commandment, that He would "incline our hearts to keep this law."

W. It certainly should be, at all times, our endeavour to live by the rules of God's holy law;

and if you look at our blessed Saviour's Sermon on the Mount, you will see that, instead of laying aside these commands which were given by Moses, He brings them directly before his hearers, shows them how these precepts had been perverted by the wickedness of men, tells them the sin and the danger of thus perverting them : then He goes on to tell them what is the true spirit of these Commandments, and how, as Christians, we are to walk by them. I often think how beautifully the true nature of these Commandments is given in the Church Catechism, in the *duty towards God*, and the *duty towards our neighbour*. We are told there, that by these Commandments we learn *two things*, and these are just the *same two things* which, as our Lord teaches us, contain all the instruction of the "Law and the Prophets." The first of these things, *the duty to God*, is contained in the first four Commandments written in the *first* table of the law ; the other, the duty towards our neighbour, is written in the *second* table of the law, in the last six Commandments. The Jews of old often forgot the great Jehovah, the true God, and worshipped other gods" instead of *Him*. They suffered themselves to be tempted by their heathen neighbours to set up images of wood, or stone or brass, to "bow down to them, and worship them : " this sin the Almighty, by his servant Moses, forbade ; and I look upon it that *we* are guilty of a like sin when we suffer anybody, or anything, to shake our faith, or draw our hearts from the love and service of God. Then we are not to take the Lord's name in vain ; not to use the name of God in a light and trifling manner, like many thoughtless and wicked people, who seem as if they could not speak a sentence without carelessly using the *sacred Name* in it.

But "the Lord will not hold such persons guiltless." He will consider them as highly *guilty* in his sight. Then we are to "keep holy the Sabbath-day,"—to hold it in serious regard and reverence, to consider it as a day of rest, and of religious worship. We must not then follow our business or our pleasure on this day, but we must "remember to keep it holy." Now, what is the sum of this first table of the law, taken in a Christian sense, but that we are to "love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our soul, and with all our strength; that we are to worship Him, to give Him thanks, to put our whole trust in Him, to call upon Him, to honour his holy name and his word,—and to serve Him truly all the days of our lives?"—Then look at the second table, and see how this teaches us to love our *neighbour*; it bids us lay aside that selfishness which would tempt us to look at our own advantage alone, and it commands us to think of the welfare of others as well as of ourselves. We are first commanded to "honour our father and our mother:" here we see the Christian duty of submission to all who are appointed to watch over us, and instruct us;—Christ's religion not only calls upon us to "love, honour, and succour our father and mother," but it requires us to "honour and obey the Queen, and all that are put in authority under her." It teaches us to be humble; to "order ourselves lowly and reverently to all who are placed over us;" to obey our "masters" and our "teachers;" to attend to our "spiritual pastors," the ministers of religion, the shepherds of our souls.

Then it is commanded, "Thou shalt not steal." A Christian will tremble to touch what belongs to another; and he will do more than this, he will

"hurt nobody by word or deed ;" he will cheat nobody ; he will deceive nobody ; he will be "true and just in all his dealings." He will "keep his hands from picking and stealing," but he will desire to do more than this ; for he is told that he is not to "bear false witness against his neighbour ;" he will therefore try to "keep his tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering."

It is likewise rightly said in the Commandments, "Thou shalt not kill ;" and we know that, according to our Lord's explanation of this, we are "to bear no malice nor hatred in our hearts."

We have likewise this Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Husbands and wives have solemnly vowed, at God's altar, to be faithful one to the other. What a crime, then, and a dishonour, it must be to break this promise ! But the religion of Christ goes farther, and teaches us "to keep our body in temperance, soberness, and chastity ;"—seeing that our "bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost." We have already seen the sin of defrauding others of their property ; but in the last of the Commandments we are told that we must "not covet" what is another's. Here we learn the Christian duty of contentment. We are not to murmur and repine at our station, or to wish for what belongs to another, but we are to employ well the talent which God hath committed to our charge : we must "learn and labour truly to get our own living, and to do our duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call us."

T. I think I see what you mean by our taking the Commandments in a Christian sense. To be sure, that is the right explanation of them. I have often thought that the meaning of them is made very plain and beautiful in the part of the Cate-

chism you have mentioned. I call the "Duty to God," and the "Duty to our neighbour," two beautiful pieces of Christian instruction ; but when I come to compare my life with these rules, I see how far I fall short.

W. And I am sure I can say the same. And I am certain, that, on hearing any of the Commandments, we have all of us need to humble ourselves, and beg that God of his mercy in Christ would pardon the past, and by his blessed Spirit incline our hearts to the love of Him, and enable us to show that our hearts are his, by our desire to do his will. "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law."

T. I think, as we have gone through so much of the service, we shall not have occasion to discourse about the remaining part. I think I see enough of the nature of it, to make me look with attention at the whole, and I think I shall be able to understand it. There is, however, one thing I should like to talk with you about. I mean the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

W. Well. You know the night in which He was betrayed, our blessed Saviour said to his disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me." He ordered it, and therefore Christians ought undoubtedly to do it. He intended it, too, for our "great and endless comfort ;"—it is a great privilege, a blessed means of grace, a delightful opportunity of acknowledging what we owe to our Lord who died for us, and a means whereby we become partakers of the benefits which He purchased for us.

T. It certainly is ; but St. Paul speaks very strongly of the sin of eating and drinking at the Lord's table *unworthily*.

W. Yes, he does. And this is a great reason why

we should "diligently try and examine ourselves;" but it is no reason why we should stay away altogether. You may be sure that St. Paul never meant *that*. He says, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup;" he does not say, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him stay away from that sacrament."

T. Why, that is very true; yet the Apostle says "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh *damnation* to himself."* That seems an awful word. Pray, William, what do you consider to be the exact meaning of that word *damnation*?

W. Why, I consider it to mean *condemnation*. It does not, however, always mean *everlasting* condemnation. Sometimes it does, and sometimes it does not.

T. What do you think it means in the 11th chapter of St. Paul's 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, where he says that unworthy communicants "eat and drink *damnation* to themselves?"

W. Why, if you read that chapter, you will find that he does *not* mean everlasting condemnation. The Corinthians, you will see, were guilty of making the Lord's Supper like a riotous feast, eating, and drinking, and quarrelling in a very profane and indecent manner: and so St. Paul tells them that this is not the way "to partake of the Lord's Supper;" and that by such conduct they justly brought down *condemnation* on themselves. The Apostle tells them what *sort* of condemnation they suffered: "many," he says, "are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." This shows that the Lord punished them with sickness and diseases, which carried off many of the people; a

* 1 Cor. xi. 29.

sore condemnation to awaken others to amendment, "that they should *not* be condemned with the world." This is very different from an *eternal* punishment.

T. Yes, that is certain ; and I think, if we take *all together* what St. Paul says about it, we shall see plainly that he never meant to keep any Christian away from the Lord's Supper ; but, *expecting to see them all there*, he desired to see them come with a right sense of what they came for.

W. Certainly.

T. But then there is one thing which just strikes me. It is this. Our *Reformers*, who wrote so long after St. Paul, seem to be quite as strict as the Apostle on this point. *They* likewise warn us against eating and drinking *unworthily*, and tell us that in so doing we eat and drink our own damnation. Did *they* mean *everlasting* condemnation ?

W. Certainly not : for they say we provoke the Almighty "to plague us with divers *diseases*, and *sundry kinds of death*." This shows that they understood the Apostle right, for these are not *eternal* punishments.

T. No, but they are sore afflictions, though.

W. Yes, indeed, they are : and plainly show the anger of God against those who attend this sacrament without seriously considering the solemn work they are engaged in ; but we may clearly see that they were never intended to keep any devout Christian away, or to prevent any sincere follower of Christ from obeying the command of his dying Lord. They invite us to come ; but they bid us to come prepared ; they tell us "to examine ourselves whether we truly repent of our former sins," whether we "stedfastly purpose to lead a new life." They exhort us to a "lively faith in Christ, a thankful remembrance of his death, and to be in charity with

all men.”* They do not allow us to come with proud pretensions of our own merits; but require us to “acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness.” They do not exhort us to “come to his table trusting in our own righteousness;” but resting all on the “manifold and great mercies of our Lord and Saviour.”†

T. Yes, I see that it is useless to wait and delay, in a vain hope that we can, of ourselves, do away our past sins, and so fit ourselves to be welcome guests. Much better is it for us humbly to say, in the words of our Communion Service, “We are unworthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table.”‡ We must plead for pardon at the footstool of that “same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy,”‡ and humbly beg that “our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, that we may evermore dwell in Him, and He in us.”‡

* Catechism.

† Communion Service.

‡ Ibid.



VILLAGE CONVERSATIONS

ON THE PRINCIPAL

OFFICES OF THE CHURCH:

**BAPTISM, THE CATECHISM, CONFIRMATION,
MATRIMONY, THE VISITATION OF THE SICK, THE BURIAL
OF THE DEAD, THE CHURCHING OF WOMEN.**



CONVERSATION I.

ON BAPTISM.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN WILLIAM WALKER AND
THOMAS BROWN.

Thomas. I WANT to ask a favour of you, William.

William. What is it, Thomas?

T. Why, I want you to stand godfather to my boy. It is time now that he should be christened, and I am very desirous that the godfathers and godmother should be people who know something about the business they take in hand. I

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call it a very solemn thing, William, to undertake a business of this sort.

W. A very solemn thing, indeed, Thomas ! And it requires a little time to consider of it, before one undertakes such a charge. You have taken me rather by surprise ; and therefore I hardly know what answer to give you just at first. If I can be of any use to you, I shall, I am sure, be truly glad. But let us talk over the matter a little. You seem to think it a very solemn thing to have a child christened. Pray how long have you considered the matter in this way ? You have other children ; did you always look upon Baptism as a thing of such great consequence as you do now ?

T. Why, no ; I used to think nothing about it. I never considered the business we were going about : and, as to godfathers and godmothers, we took any of our relations, or anybody that we could get, without once thinking whether they intended to do their duty by the child, or whether they did not : I cared nothing about it.

W. Now, *there*, Thomas, I think you were wrong.

T. Wrong ! to be sure I was. And the children might just as well have had no godfathers and godmothers at all. Not one word of Christian advice have any of them ever given the children, from the time they made their solemn promise to this very moment.

W. Why, Thomas, as you and your wife are both living, and both able to instruct your children yourselves, there was not the same occasion for the godfathers and godmothers to interfere, as if the dear children had been left without their parents.

T. Why, true, William. But I think people should not take upon themselves these solemn vows, if they are not in earnest. And, if they were in earnest, a word of advice might have been

thrown in now and then ; and a little inquiry how the children were going on in their education ; and whether they were learning those things which were promised for them. I should not have called this *interfering* ; I should have thought it kind.

W. When I said *interfering*, I did not mean to consider it wrong to make such inquiries as you speak of : but some people would be very angry if anybody attempted to *doubt* whether all was right or not.

T. Yes ; but how strange that must be ! How *very* strange it must be for any parents to ask their friends to enter into a solemn engagement for them, and then be offended because these friends seem desirous of *keeping* their engagement ! My wife and I always, I hope, loved our children ; but we certainly have not thought as we ought to have done of the great engagements which were made for them at their Baptism : and we truly did stand in need of advice.

W. But, pray, Thomas, how is it that you have now got to think of this so very differently from what you formerly did ?

T. Why, William, since you and I conversed together on the prayers which we use in the Church,* I have considered them all, over and over again, very carefully ; and I see how wonderfully full they are of real religion, and how they teach us to ask for everything we can want. The religion of Christians is, indeed, there : and the more I consider this, the more I feel assured of it ; and this has led me to look at *other* parts of the service, such as Baptism, and Confirmation, and Matrimony, and the Visitation of the Sick, and the rest : and I see that they are all in the self-same spirit ; all done so as to guide us through this world like those

* See "Village Conversations on the Liturgy," &c.



who are travelling to a better. It was by reading carefully the service for Baptism that I learned what a sacred thing Baptism is. I should like to have some conversation with you on all these services. At present, the matter uppermost in my mind is the Baptismal Service. I know nothing more about it than just what I find in the Prayer Book ; but this seems to me to give a very clear view of the subject. Perhaps you can tell me something more about it.

W. Why, I know no more about it myself, Thomas, than what I have read there : but I think the Prayer Book seems to contain just what one should wish to know about it, if we would but consider it properly, and act according to it.

T. Yes ; but how many people are there who never *look* at the *service* at all before they take a child to be christened, and so know nothing about what they are doing !

W. Yes, that is a sad thing, indeed, Thomas : but it is no excuse for *us*, you know.

T. No : I am aware of that : and, indeed, nobody is more to blame in this way than I have been myself ; but it is my wish to take my child to church this time with a better knowledge of what I am doing, and with a sincere desire that it should become "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven."

W. Yes. And since I see that you are really in earnest in what you are going to do, I shall be truly glad if my poor assistance can be of any use to you ; and I will consent to be one of the godfathers to your child, with all my heart.

T. Thank you heartily, my good friend ; I have another neighbour in my eye to stand with you, who seems to think very much of that which is good ; and my wife has asked a relation of hers to be the godmother, but she has not given us a



fixed answer yet : she is a religious woman, and she thinks very seriously of the duty of a god-mother, and that is the very reason why we wished to have her ; but she seems afraid of venturing upon so weighty a business.

W. I think that is a pity, Thomas. To undertake such a thing lightly is very wrong indeed ; but to stand for a child is a great opportunity of being useful ; and it would be a sad thing if all religious people were to refuse the office, for fear of doing wrong.

T. I think so too : for that would be leaving it altogether in the hands of those who were the worse fitted for it. But if you are not in a very great hurry, William, let us just look at the service for Baptism in the Prayer Book ; all people should certainly do this before they carry a child to be baptized.

W. To be sure they should. Pray, lend me your book. I think it is a very solemn thing for a child to be baptized according to Christ's command, and to be received into the congregation of his flock. Some people make it a rule to have their children baptized at home almost as soon as they are born, for fear they should die, as they say, *without a name*.

T. Yes, that was always *my* way ; I always wished to have the children *named*, and then we carried them to church to be christened, any time afterwards ; we have sometimes waited a year or more ; and one time we had two of our children christened at once.

W. Ay, now, that is what I cannot say I agree with you in.

T. I would not do so *now*, William ; we always used to think the great matter was to have the child *named*, or, as some people call it *half-baptized* : but I think I see the matter differently

now. I should not, indeed, like a child to die without being named ; but it is not for the sake of the *name*, but because I take Baptism to be a sacrament "ordained by Christ Himself." Our Saviour has appointed his Sacraments as the "outward signs" by which we receive "inward and spiritual grace," and are made partakers of the promises of the Gospel. Water is the outward sign in the Sacrament of Baptism ; and therefore, when the water is used, *then* is the Baptism. We should not call this being *half*-baptized, for it is being *wholly* baptized. The other part, which we commonly call being *christened*, is the public admittance into the church, where the whole congregation put up their prayers together, that the child, having been admitted "into Christ's flock, may ever continue in the number of Christ's people, and lead the rest of its life according to this beginning." This, as I think, ought to be done *at the same time*, as soon as it can conveniently be done. I would not keep a child back from its Christian privileges if I could help it.

W. Certainly not. In case of illness, *private* Baptism is allowed ; but the other is the proper way.

T. To be sure it must ; and I am very glad that our minister now always baptizes the children "immediately after the last Lesson," instead of waiting till service is over, and the people are all gone. It is a beautiful service, and it must do the people good to hear it ; besides, it certainly is a service which belongs to the *congregation*, — they are to join in it : and how much more may we expect that the dear infant, to be dedicated to God, should continue his faithful servant, when a whole congregation of Christian worshippers are pouring forth their prayers in its behalf !

W. Certainly, and this is the way in which the

rubric directs that it should be done.—You know what the *rubric* means, *now*, Thomas ?

T. Oh, yes, the *directions* ; you explained *that* to me before.

W. Well, these directions say that Baptism should be administered “when the most number of people come together,” and that it should be “immediately after the last Lesson,” either in the morning or evening service ; and therefore I am glad that our minister does it at these times ; and, I believe, besides the blessing which we may thus hope for the child, it is a great call to every one of us to remember our own vows ; and to think to what great blessings, and to what great duties, as Christians, we are called. There may, however, perhaps, be some good reasons for altering the time. But *whenever* this service is performed, it is our business to think very seriously what we are about, and to consider that a child is to be offered to the service of its Maker and Redeemer by a solemn sacrament, according to the direction of Christ Himself. The Baptismal Service, likewise, brings to our view the great doctrines of our holy religion, and shows us our obligation to walk in its appointed ways. It begins by reminding us that we are “born in sin, and that none can enter into the kingdom of heaven except he be regenerate and born anew of water and of the Holy Spirit.” Now, it is the Spirit of God that regenerates us and makes us fit to enter into the kingdom of heaven ; it is this “inward spiritual grace” which the Scriptures, the Catechism, and the Baptismal Service all teach us to be the thing needful to prepare sinful mortals for heaven ; it is this that changes those who are by nature “children of wrath,” into “children of grace,”—and that makes those who are “born in sin,” to be heirs of the Gospel promises,—“inhe-

ritors of the kingdom of heaven." Now, of this "inward and spiritual grace" the water is an "outward and visible sign;" it is a sign, "ordained by Christ Himself," and we may truly expect, if we receive it rightly, that God's blessing will go with it.

T. We certainly may trust that it will be so. As our blessed Saviour has said, "Suffer little children to come unto me," I could not be happy without publicly offering my child to the service of its Lord; and I really and faithfully trust that I may then have the comfort and happiness of believing that it is indeed one of the flock of Christ.

W. I firmly believe so, I assure you, Thomas; and, if the child should die, I should have the greatest confidence that it would be taken, through the merits of its Saviour, into the happiness of heaven.

T. Yes; and if the child should live, I think that, having been thus admitted into the flock of Christ, in the way of Christ's own appointment, it might look for those privileges and promises which are given to Christians in the Gospel.

W. I think so myself; and it is my opinion, that we are many of us apt too think too lightly of this Sacrament of Baptism, and to forget to what great privileges it introduces us.

T. Yes, and sometimes I think we are apt to get into a mistake of another kind,—supposing, that because we have been admitted regularly into Christ's family by baptism, we shall therefore be saved; without thinking of the great duties to which we are bound by the vows which were then made for us.

W. But how beautifully all this is expressed in the Baptismal Service in the Prayer Book! By Baptism a child is received into the flock of Christ, or "grafted into the body of Christ's Church;" but we must remember that a Christian is not only admitted to great *privileges*, but that he is

called to great *duties*. Our Saviour has told us, in the third chapter of the Gospel of St. John, that "none can enter into the kingdom of heaven except he be regenerate, and born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost ;"* the minister reminds us of this when we take our children to be baptized. He then calls upon us to join with him in prayer that the child may receive that which "by nature he cannot have,"—that he may be "baptized with water." But this is not enough ; he bids us to pray likewise that he may be baptized "with the Holy Ghost ;" and may not only be admitted into Christ's holy Church, but may "be made a lively member of the same."

T. Yes ; and a *lively* member of Chrst's Church, I suppose, means one who has a *lively faith*, which teaches him not only to believe what is written in the Scriptures, but to receive its promises and its privileges thankfully, and to seek to live faithfully by its rules.

W. Yes. It is exactly what is expressed in the Baptismal Service ; it is to "fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto our life's end."

T. To bring a child to Baptism, then, is no light matter, when we consider to what a high character he is called. And, as he is signed with the sign of the cross, this should for ever remind him that he is not to be "ashamed to acknowledge the faith of Christ crucified."

W. I assure you, my friend Thomas, that it is a great pleasure to me to see that you have such a proper sense of the meaning and of the importance of the Sacrament of Baptism ; and since it is so, it is with real satisfaction that I have undertaken to be godfather to your child.—And may God's grace and blessing be with us in this important undertaking !

* St. John, chap. iii.

T. That is my prayer from the bottom of my heart : and I thank you sincerely for your kindness in agreeing to my wish. I should be glad to have the christening soon ; for, as the child is healthy, it ought not to be baptized at home, but should be baptized and received into the Church at once, in the proper way,—there is no reason for having it otherwise, or for delaying it.

W. None, that I know of ; and I shall be ready, whenever you think proper to fix the day.—And so now I must leave you for the present.

T. Well, before we part, William, I have just two things to say.

W. What are they, Thomas ?

T. Why, the first is, that as Baptism is a Sacrament ordained by Christ Himself, and as such great blessings belong to it, we should do very wrong to keep our children from this sacrament, and thus keep them away from the blessings which are offered them.

W. Certainly. We do very wrong to refuse those privileges to our children which Christ has mercifully offered to them :—for the merciful offers of the Gospel are made to children as well as to others.

T. That is my opinion, I assure you ; and I consider, that by bringing our children to be baptized, we show our desire to accept these offers ; and, by faith, we expect that the promises which Christ has made “He will most certainly keep and perform.” But the next thing I would say is, that whilst we see the great benefits belonging to the Sacrament of Baptism, we are not to rest in these, as if, the child being now made a Christian, we might now rest at our ease, supposing that nothing further was to be done.

W. No, that would be a great mistake indeed ; but I think that any one who reads the Baptismal Service would never be led into such an error.

We all pray that the child "may lead the rest of his life according to this *beginning*:" that he, being "dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness," may "crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin;" that "as he is" (by his admission into the Christian covenant) "made partaker of the death of Christ, he may also be made partaker of his resurrection; so that finally he may be an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." By this prayer, we show, that Baptism does not secure the inheritance of heaven, but that it is an admission into that state in which we are constantly to pray and strive to be prepared for that inheritance. If indeed the child should die before it is old enough to know what sin is, then we believe that it will be saved, through the merits of Christ,—since it became a member of Christ at its Baptism.

T. Yes: and our Church calls a Christian state a new birth unto *righteousness*; showing that Christian privileges are not *instead* of righteousness, but to *lead* to righteousness.

W. To be sure: and whoever knows anything of the nature of man, will see that, to keep him in a state of watchfulness and preparation for the kingdom of heaven, he will need Divine assistance during the whole course of his life; he will require to be "daily renewed by the Holy Spirit;" and it is our "parts and duties" to use our best endeavours, that the child "may be taught, so soon as he shall be able to learn," the great duties which belong to the profession of a Christian. We ought to see that it be "brought up to lead a godly and a Christian life,"—to "follow the example of Christ,"—"to be made like unto Him,"—"to die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living."



CONVERSATION II.

THE CATECHISM.

Thomas. WERE you at church, William, last Sunday afternoon?

William. Oh yes.

T. I do not remember seeing you.

W. I am glad of it, Thomas, because it shows that you were paying attention to what you went to church for, instead of staring and looking about you.

T. Well, I am glad you were there; for I am sure you would be pleased with hearing the minister catechize the children, and the children giving their answers so well.

W. Oh, yes, I was very much pleased indeed : and I was quite glad to find that all the children were so very perfect in their Catechism, and that they repeated it so distinctly and so well ; and, what is of a great deal more consequence, they seemed thoroughly to understand it too : for the minister kept asking them a great many questions, besides those that are in the book : and the children answered these, so as to show that they knew well what they were about.

T. Yes, and the minister explained a good many things himself, that I had never properly considered before : I assure you I thought the Catechism a very useful lesson to grown people, as well as to children.

W. To be sure it is. I remember, when I was a boy, I was taught to *say* my Catechism ; but I was never taught to consider well what it meant. So, when I grew up, and looked at it again, I saw that there was a great deal of it that I did not understand, and I assure you it is but lately that I have thought the subject well over, and have seen how much there was of Christian doctrine in the Catechism of the Church.

T. Nobody could help seeing that, who attended to what we heard on Sunday. The Catechism seems to me to contain a short statement of the right faith and practice of a Christian. How thankful, then, we ought to be that it is taught to our children ! and how anxious we ought to be that they should thoroughly understand it ! But it does seem to me a sad mistake to consider the Catechism as belonging to children only, and to think that *men* and *women* have nothing to do with it.

W. Yes, this is a grievous mistake, and I am sorry to say that it is a very common one. It seems to me that the Catechism contains an explanation of such things as the Bible tells us are to guide us

throughout all our lives, and to lead us to heaven when this life is past. And our Church, anxious that we should none of us be ignorant of these things, requires us to be taught them as soon as ever we are able to understand them.

T. To be sure: we are to learn them when we are young, that we may have our minds and our practices influenced by them, during our whole Christian course. I remember the minister told us on Sunday, that the Catechism was an explanation of five different things.

1. The Baptismal Covenant.
2. The Belief.
3. The Commandments.
4. Prayer.
5. The Sacraments.

Now it seems to me that these are just the things that we ought to be well instructed in, and that ought to be fixed deeply in our minds:—

1. For if, through the free mercy of God, we, when children, are admitted into covenant with Him, it highly becomes us all to know the terms of that covenant by which we are pledged. Now we know that we are conceived and born in sin. But the religion of Christ is wholly and entirely in opposition to sin. No one, therefore, can be one of Christ's flock, who is not, at the same time, an enemy to sin. The very first thing, therefore, that is required of Christians, is repentance; which means not only sorrow for past sins, but also an earnest desire to forsake sin for the time to come. Then there is required faith, or sincere belief, by which we accept and steadfastly believe the promises of the Gospel; that for the sake of Christ's sufferings, our sins will be blotted out, and we shall be received into favour; and enabled by the Holy Spirit, to lead holy and Christian lives.

W. Yes ; repentance and faith are required of all those who would enter into the Gospel covenant.

T. But we read that the godfathers and godmothers promised, in baptism, three things in the infant's name ; but you say *two* ; and at the end of the Catechism the same thing is said,—*two* things are required of persons to be baptized, *repentance* and *faith*.

W. Let us consider, Thomas ; for there is generally in the Church services something so exact and consistent, that I dare say we shall find it here too.—Let us see. The *three* things promised in the name of the infant are, first to “renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh :—well, this I call *repentance* ; it is “to forsake sin.” The second promise was “to believe all the articles of the Christian faith ;” this I call *faith* ;—now let us see the *third*, it is “to keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our life ;” well, this is not different from repentance and faith : it is, in fact, a part of repentance, and the fruit of faith.

T. Yes, I see that the doctrine is the same in both parts of the Catechism ; and I see, too, that a repentance and faith which lead to such a truly Christian life contain the very substance of the Gospel of Christ.

W. I think so ; and,—when we think of the things that have been promised for us,—how anxious and how watchful we ought to be that we really do live according to that Gospel into which we are admitted, and by the rules of which we are bound !—for it will in no way avail to our salvation to have had these things promised for

us, if we do not fulfil the promises in our own lives and practices. We are required to have godfathers and godmothers ; and, before they are trusted with the care of a Christian child, they are required solemnly to declare a belief in the Gospel of Christ and a determination, with God's help, to live by its rules. They are, then, bound to see that the child be brought up to "lead a godly and a Christian life:" but every baptized person is warned against trusting to the promises of others, instead of giving heed, in his own person, to act according to his baptismal vows. We are taught in the Catechism, that we are ourselves "bound to believe and to do as was promised for us." How positively the Church calls upon us to be ourselves holy ! When we are asked whether we are bound to this, we say, "Yes, verily." And how beautifully full of the true Christian Spirit is this answer ;—what *humility* !—what *gratitude* ! what a desire after a Christian life ! I will, *by God's help, and I heartily thank* our heavenly Father that He hath called me to this state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour."—But it is not enough to be admitted to the blessings of Christ's religion : we are required to *persevere* ; but for this, too, we need the constant help of divine grace. "I pray unto God to give me his grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end."

T. I think I see what the "baptismal covenant" means ; and it certainly must be right that we should remember this our solemn engagement all the days of our lives. This does not only belong to children, but to persons of every age.

W. Certainly ; and we ought constantly to bear this in mind ; and therefore as you have said, it

is a grievous mistake to think that we may lay aside our Catechism when we grow up, just as if it were nothing more than a book for children.

THE BELIEF.

T. Now, suppose, William, we look at the second part of the Catechism.

W. The CREED, or BELIEF, is clearly explained in the Catechism. It is a declaration that we believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. This Creed is publicly pronounced by us whenever we go to church; and as some people might perhaps repeat the words without knowing the meaning of them, the Catechism shows us what we principally or "chiefly learn in these articles of our belief;"—first, to believe in "God the Father, who hath made us and all the world;" secondly, in "God the Son, who hath redeemed us and all mankind;"—and thirdly, in "God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth us and all the elect people of God." This is so plainly expressed here, that I do not know that we need take up much time in trying to make it plainer.

T. The chief meaning of the Apostles' Creed does, to be sure, seem to be very clearly explained in a very few words, in the Catechism; but yet I think, there is a great deal in it for our further consideration.

When we say that we believe in God the FATHER, we are led to ask ourselves, whether we honour Him and obey Him as our Father; and we cannot help grieving at the thought that, as He made us and "all the world," there should be any in the *world* who do not look up to Him as their Almighty Father,—their Maker,—and their constant Preserver.

Again, when we declare that we believe in

"God the Son who hath redeemed us and all mankind," should we not ask ourselves whether we really do trust to his merits, and consider them as the price of our redemption, and look upon his sufferings and death as the only means by which a way of salvation is opened to us; as the method by which "alone we obtain remission of our sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of heaven?"* And are we truly thankful when we acknowledge that this redemption extends to all men,—that we can each of us say, "I believe in God the Son, who redeemed me and all mankind?"

Again, when we say, "I believe in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me and all the elect people of God," we must see that those who are sanctified or made holy, are made so by the Holy Spirit of God: and this ought to lead us earnestly to pray for the help of that Divine Power, that we may be among the number of those devout Christians, who, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, shall receive that inheritance which Christ hath purchased for us all, and which will be given to all those who, by faith, accept the offered mercy, and who, by a holy life, seek to be prepared for it.

Let us look, however, at the next division of the Catechism.

THE COMMANDMENTS.

W. I think that you and I did discuss the Commandments before,† when we were talking about the Church Prayers.

T. Yes, we did; and we remarked that the Ten Commandments were explained in that part of the Catechism called the "Duty to God," and

* Communion Service.

† See p. 87.

the "Duty to our Neighbour :"—that the "Duty to God" explained the first table of the Law, that is, the *first four* commandments ;—and that the "Duty to our Neighbour" explained the second table of the Law, that is, the *last six* commandments.

W. Yes, and very beautiful explanations they are, teaching, in a Christian sense, the whole substance of the Law and the Prophets, "love to God," and "love to man."

But since we have already conversed on this part, we perhaps should do better to go on to the next division.

PRAYER.

As the Lord's Prayer is that which Christ Himself taught us to use, and as all our prayers are made after the model and manner of that prayer, it seems quite proper that the person who examines children should know whether they can say that prayer. We know that it is a Christian's duty to study the commandments of God, and to endeavour to live by them ; but the Catechism shows us that "we are not able to do these things of ourselves, nor to walk in the commandments of God without his special grace, which we must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer. Now, when the child has said the "Lord's Prayer," the examiner asks the meaning of what has been said : "What desirest thou of God in this Prayer ?" Then follows the explanation in the Catechism, which teaches us the meaning of the prayer. We say, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Now, by these words, we acknowledge God to be our heavenly Father ; we pray that his name may be

held in great honour ; that the knowledge of Him may spread throughout the world, and that it may be the desire of all mankind on earth to do his will, as it is the desire of angels in heaven. Or, as the Catechism explains it, we each of us are to understand ourselves as saying, "I desire my Lord God our heavenly Father, who is the giver of all goodness, to send his grace unto me, and to all people, that we may worship Him, serve Him, and obey Him, as we ought to do." When we say, "Give us this day our daily bread," it is asking for such things as our heavenly Father sees to be sufficient for the supply of our bodily wants, and also to send us the bread of life which cometh from above, namely, the blessings of his Gospel and his grace ; or, as it is explained, "all things that be needful both for our souls and bodies." When we say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," and ask of the Almighty, that He would not "lead us into temptation, but would deliver us from evil," we are asking, as the Catechism explains it, that our heavenly Father "would be merciful unto us, and forgive us our sins, and that it would please Him to save and defend us from all enemies, ghostly (spiritual) and bodily, and from all sin and wickedness, and from everlasting death : " and when we say, "Amen," we mean, "so be it." We express our confidence that God both can and will give us those things that we ask for : "this I trust He will do of his mercy and goodness, and therefore I say, 'Amen,' so be it."

T. It seems to me that the answer to the question, "What desirest thou of God in this Prayer ?" gives a clear explanation of the meaning of the Lord's Prayer. But, to go thoroughly into an examination of every separate part of the Prayer

would take up much more room than would be right in an examination of children. But there is so much in the Lord's Prayer, that the more we consider it, the more we find to think of; and if our minds are in such a state as to ask sincerely for all the things which this prayer contains, we shall be really thankful that our Lord hath given us his directions how to pray, and we shall see how exactly suited these petitions are to a Christian's wants.

But now I think we have considered four of the divisions of the Catechism.

The next contains

THE SACRAMENTS.

W. Yes, the explanation of the two Sacraments, *Baptism*, and the *Supper of the Lord*.

T. Yes: and the question is then very properly asked, "What is the meaning of the word Sacrament?" And the answer just explains what it means: and, from this answer, we see that *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper* are both sacraments, and that there are these two sacraments only.

W. Yes, these two only. In the Roman Catholic Church I think that they reckon five* more sacraments besides the two which are really such: but, however useful some of these services may be, none of them can be considered as *sacraments*, for a sacrament is "an outward visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us:" it is some outward sign appointed by Christ as a means of receiving some inward grace, and a pledge whereby that grace is, as it were, secured to us.

T. Why, yes, I think I so understand it. *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper* are both sacraments,

* These are Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction. See 25th Article of our Church.

because there is an outward sign, and an inward grace, belonging to both. In Baptism *water* is the outward sign: it is a sign of that inward purifying of the heart which is called regeneration, "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness." And in the Lord's supper, bread and wine are the outward signs: and they represent the body and blood of Christ, which is received inwardly and spiritually by the faithful in the Lord's supper.

W. I think, Thomas, you and I understand this alike: the Catechism, indeed, explains it clearly, and in a very few words. But, for fear that we should be contented with only understanding these things, or only receiving them, we are taught in what state of mind we ought to receive them, that they may not be mere forms, but may be really made instrumental to the good of our souls.

T. It is very true. For those who would receive the blessings of Christ's religion, two things are needful, *repentance* and *faith*. I think the Bible says, "Repent, and believe the Gospel;" and here, the Catechism reminds us that there must be sorrow for past sins, and a humble but firm resolution to forsake them—which is *repentance*; and that there must be likewise *faith*, that is, a belief in the Gospel promises, that through Christ's merits those who truly repent will be received into favour.

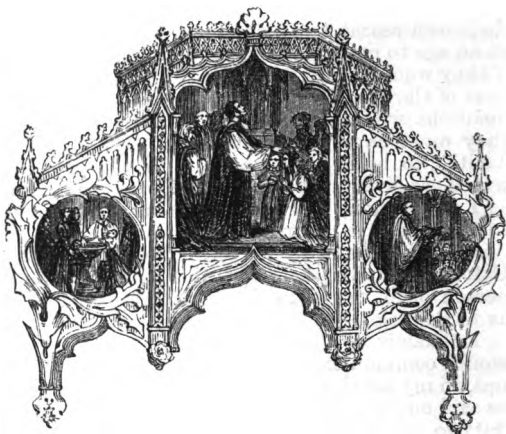
W. Certainly these two things are required of persons to be baptized: we know from Scripture that it is so.

T. Yes, and because infants cannot themselves perform these things, cannot exercise repentance and faith, this is a very good reason why other persons should do it in their names. But the Church again calls upon these infants to declare

their own assent to these things, when they come to an age to understand their meaning. So that, if they would desire, or expect, to be sound members of Christ's Church, they must have those dispositions which are required of Christ's people ; they must have "repentance" for past sins, and "faith" to believe the promises to the penitent which are given in the Gospel. This is the reason, as I understand, why young persons are brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him.

W. Yes, certainly. We see, moreover, that the Catechism shows the disposition with which any person ought to go to the Lord's Supper, as well as to Baptism.

T. Exactly so. And the duty of those who would communicate is given in very few words : but, to my mind, these words express all that can be said on the subject. I know it is a Christian's duty to attend this sacrament, and I see that he ought to consider well what he is doing, and seek to attend it with a right disposition. It would be well for us all if we would see that we are to attend the Lord's Table, because the Lord hath commanded all his followers to do so. And that we may go in a right state of preparation, we should do well "to examine ourselves whether we truly repent of our former sins," "steadfastly purposing" and fully intending "to lead a new life ;" whether we "have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ," expecting pardon of our sins, in consequence of his sacrifice : whether we "have a thankful remembrance of his death :—" such a sense of gratitude for this great act of mercy as shall lead us to love and obey Him ; and whether we are seeking and striving and desiring to be in "charity," that is, love and peace, "with all men."



CONVERSATION III.

ON CONFIRMATION.

Thomas. I FIND, William, that the Bishop is expected to come soon ; and as I intend my eldest boy to go to be confirmed, I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with you on the subject. I know very well that all the services which are appointed by the Church have great use and meaning if we understand them properly ; and I therefore think we ought to try to understand them, and not engage in any of them without an anxious desire to see well what we are doing, and an earnest wish that we may be thus helped on in our Christian course.

William. It is very true, Thomas :—and I should

hope that nobody would go to the Bishop to be confirmed without well considering, beforehand, the solemn work that he is going to perform.

T. Nobody *should* go, without such consideration: but many I am afraid *do* go without any right consideration at all. I remember when I went to be confirmed myself, I had none of the feeling which I ought to have had. And yet it was nobody's fault but my own. The clergyman examined us all; and I was able to answer the questions which he asked,—and so all seemed well; but he could not see into my heart, and know how very little I thought upon the solemn engagement I was entering upon.

W. No: that belongs to God alone. But the clergyman was right in asking you such questions as he believed to be necessary. It was his duty to see that you could say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and answer such other questions out of the Catechism as he might think fit to ask. In Confirmation, we take upon ourselves the vow which was made for us at our Baptism by others; so that the clergyman cannot properly present you to the Bishop, unless you can satisfy him that you know what that vow was. If you could answer such questions as the clergyman put to you, he would not wish to keep you from the Bishop: but whether you went with an honest and sincere desire to engage solemnly in the service of Christ, to whom you here pledged yourself,—for this you must answer to God alone.

T. Why, this is exactly what I feel: and I therefore now see what a sin it was to go carelessly to such a service. I trust that, through God's mercy, I am brought to repent of this my sin: and for this and all my other offences, I look for pardon through that Saviour, whom I trust it

is now my desire to serve. But as I see the danger of undertaking such solemn engagements carelessly, you cannot wonder at my wish that my children should think of what they are doing, more devoutly than I did myself.

W. It is indeed a subject which requires very serious consideration. Every one who goes to be confirmed should not only *understand* what he is doing, but should feel the *great importance* of it.

T. Let us look at our Prayer Book, William. We shall see there exactly the nature of the service.

W. Here it is, Thomas ;—and here is the place. —THE ORDER OF CONFIRMATION ;—it comes directly after the Catechism.

T. Well, now, here we read exactly what Confirmation is. It is, "That children, being now come to the years of discretion, and having learned what their godfathers and godmothers promised for them at their baptism, may themselves, with their own mouths and consent, openly before the Church, ratify and confirm the same ; and also promise, that, by the grace of God, they will evermore endeavour, themselves, faithfully to observe such things as they by their own confession have assented unto."—These are the words that are addressed to those who go to be confirmed, and by these the meaning of Confirmation is plainly shown ; it is taking the baptismal vow upon ourselves. The Bishop then solemnly asks those who come to him, whether they really come with a sincere desire of renewing with God the covenant into which they were admitted by others, when they were infants. He puts this question, "Do ye here, in the presence of God and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your Baptism ; ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledg-

ing yourselves bound to believe and to do all those things which your godfathers and godmothers then undertook for you?" And every one is to answer, "I DO." Now this I call something so solemn, that it ought *not* to be undertaken without much thought and consideration. I was talking to my neighbour, Williamson, yesterday, on this matter, and he is so particular about it that he will not let his children go to be confirmed at all.

W. Why, there I think he is wrong. Whatever belongs to us as Christians, ought to be done? there is danger of doing *any* of our religious services unworthily: but this thought should teach us to watch and pray, and strive, with God's help, to do them with a right spirit? it should not serve us as an excuse for neglecting them. When we neglect to perform any known duty, we are sure that we are doing wrong.

T. So I think. And for that reason, I mean that my boy should go; and I shall try, with God's blessing, to make him understand *why* he goes. Now it seems to me that, to understand Confirmation properly, we should look at the baptismal service.

W. Certainly; because Confirmation is a renewal of Baptism; I mean, it is taking upon ourselves the promise made for us at Baptism.

T. Exactly so: and this is just showing what it is to be sincere Christians, and pledging ourselves that it is our desire, and shall be our endeavour to be such. But we cannot be such without the help of God's Spirit; and we cannot expect to receive such help, unless we sincerely desire to be led by that Spirit, and to make it our study to live according to our Christian profession.

W. We cannot: we must seek earnestly for God's Holy Spirit, to enable us to serve Him; and

we may more particularly expect to receive his help, when we are seeking it in his holy ordinances ; and if we are sincerely desirous of such help, and anxious to live by it, we shall also desire to engage, on our own parts, in this solemn covenant, that our faith may be strengthened, and our exertions enlivened. Besides, even though we neglect this ordinance, we are still answerable for our behaviour just the same. We have the same work to do ; and we are giving up a great opportunity of acquiring the needful help.

T. That is certainly true. If we understand aright what a Christian's calling is, we shall gladly embrace every means of acquiring strength for our work. Surely every one who goes to be confirmed should know what his work is, and he will then be truly thankful that there are such great privileges and such gracious promises belonging to Christians. He will be anxious to partake of all the great privileges and blessings which the Gospel promises, and he will be full of gratitude for them ; and this feeling of gratitude will lead him to desire, in all things, to act up to his Christian profession, and, in every thing, to do the will of God.

W. It will, indeed. A true Christian delights in thinking of God's mercies, and is thankful for every blessing and every grace which God so mercifully bestows ; and this gratitude shows itself in a desire to do the will of God, and in an earnest endeavour to walk in his ways.

T. To be sure : and I look upon a Christian's business to be stated in the service of Baptism ; and no man is allowed to be called a Christian, unless he is pledged to act as such. But, as this pledge was entered into for us at Baptism by *others*, if we desire to be Christians, now we are of age to think for ourselves, we must now take upon our-

selves this vow ; and we must do it as if we really wished and intended to keep it. We know what the vow is.

It is, 1st, "To renounce the devil and all his works," to give up everything that we know to be contrary to the will of God ;—"the pomps and vanities of this wicked world : " everything that is contrary to godliness, however it may be practised by the world around us ;—"all the sinful lusts of the flesh," all those practices which go to the indulgence of the body, if they are contrary to the purity of the soul.

2ndly, We are bound, as Christians, to "believe all the articles of the Christian faith ;" to accept with sincere trust and confidence all that is written in the Christian Scriptures, and to look for salvation to the method by which it is there promised, *i. e.* through the merits of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

3rdly, We are bound to live like Christians, "to keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our lives."—Now these are solemn promises. But they are all such as Christians are, and must be, bound by ; but when we engage publicly to be bound by them, we ought certainly to do this with the greatest seriousness, and most devout attention.

W. We ought, indeed.

T. I remember, when I went to be confirmed, the churchwarden sent us all in a waggon, and we were laughing and playing the whole of the way, and so were in no very good state to go about such a solemn work ; and then, after the service was over, we were taken to the ale-house, and had bread and cheese and beer, and we all thought it nothing else but a fine holiday.

W. Why, Thomas, I must say a word for the

churchwarden there—for the town is rather too far to walk to, and he took you in his waggon that you might not go in hot and weary! so that this was meant as an accommodation to you. If you joined in improper conversation, and drove good thoughts out of your minds, it was your own faults, you know.

T. To be sure it was.

W. And then again—after the service, it was needful that you should have some refreshment, and you were therefore taken to the public-house to get it; if you behaved ill there, it was your own faults again.

T. Oh yes, I know it; but yet it seems to me that it is a great matter to keep the mind in a right state on such occasions, and therefore nothing should be done which is likely to drive out good thoughts and put in bad ones. I should be very sorry to have my boy led into any temptation on that day, to forget what a solemn engagement he was undertaking; and rather than run any risk of it, I would willingly give up my day's work for the sake of going with him myself, that he might thus stand a better chance of keeping out of harm's way.

W. Why, I think it would be your duty to do so. But I should hope there would not be any occasion for it; for you know what great pains our good clergyman has taken to teach all the young people how solemnly they ought to have their minds turned to the business they are engaging in: and you know how particular he and the gentlemen of the parish were in fixing upon such churchwardens as had a right and religious knowledge of their Christian duties: and you know, besides, how desirous they were that both the clerk and the schoolmaster should be truly Christian men; and I think they

are such ;—so that, whoever goes with the children to the Confirmation, they will endeavour to keep them out of the way of what is wrong, and will try to fix their minds on the subject which, at such a time, ought most to be in their minds.

T. Why, yes, I believe no parish can be better off than ours in these respects. I know the clergyman will have an eye to them himself :—and, when he is obliged to be away, still they will be in good hands.

W. I think so ; and I truly hope that God's blessing may be with them, that they may all be, what in this service they pledge themselves to be, the faithful servants of God—"and that they may be his for ever."

T. Yes ; we cannot pray for them in words better than those which the church appoints the Bishop himself to use on laying his hands on the children.—"Defend, O Lord, this thy child with thy heavenly grace, that he may continue thine for ever, and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto thy everlasting kingdom."





CONVERSATION IV.

ON THE MARRIAGE SERVICE.

William. Do you know what the bells are ringing for this morning, Thomas? You seem to be coming from the church, so perhaps you can tell me.

Thomas. Oh yes; why don't you know that Richard Simpson is married to Ann Deck?

W. Oh, they are married, are they? I heard them asked out last Sunday, but I did not know when they were to be married. Well, I think they

are two as steady young people as any in the parish ; and I hope they will be happy.

T. I hope so too ; and there seems every prospect of it. I have known Richard for several years, and he is what I call a truly well-disposed youth. He has always been regular at church, and he seemed to take a delight in learning what was good, and in living according to it ; and I think that he has chosen a wife of pretty much the same way of thinking as himself : they both of them seem to be industrious and considerate young people ; and, as far as we can judge, I think they are both impressed with the importance of religion, and that they really both of them wish to be partakers of its blessings and to be guided by its rules. I have had a good deal of conversation with Richard lately, and he very much wished that I should attend him to church at his wedding : and you know his bride is a sort of relation of mine, and I have known her for some time ; and she was glad that I should give her away.

W. Oh, now I understand why you should be coming from the church.

T. Yes : I was willing to go with them, as they both wished it. And I can assure you, that I never saw a wedding better conducted in my life,—every thing was so decent and becoming ; there was in both the bride and the bridegroom a sort of religious reverence, which we do not often see on such occasions.

W. But it is what there ought *always* to be on such occasions, Thomas.

T. To be sure. The Church service tells us, that “matrimony is an honourable estate, instituted of God,”—“that it is not to be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly,”—but “reverently, discreetly, advisedly, and in the fear of

God." Now, when we are thus reminded of the sacred nature of this engagement, and when we are going to make a solemn vow, which is to be binding upon us all our lives,—and when this is done, too, in the house of God,—and when we thus, with particular solemnity, call upon Him to be a witness of the sacredness of our engagement, it must show a very wrong state of mind, indeed, to be careless and trifling *at such a time*.

W. It must, indeed. But how often do we see people go to attend a wedding as if it were a merry-making, and an opportunity of showing off their fine clothes ! one would not wish to see people with a sad and melancholy look on such an occasion ; but there is a difference between being melancholy, and being properly thoughtful. Sometimes I have seen the bride and bridegroom themselves behaving in a very careless and unbecoming manner ; but this I think does not often happen. It is the people that go to see the wedding that generally behave the worst. There are some idle gossips in this parish that are sure to be at every wedding, though they perhaps seldom are at church at any other time : and then there is often a noise, and a whispering, and laughing, and a going in and out, and a clattering of pattens, so as to raise a very great disturbance in the church, and to make everything quite different from what it ought to be.

T. I wish you had been at church this morning, William, you would have seen nothing to find fault with. I had heard that our good minister, when he first came to the parish, had talked very seriously to the people who came to see a wedding. They had not behaved to his mind : and when service was over, he begged them to stop a few minutes, as he had a word or two to say to them ;

and they listened very attentively to what he said, and he then told them, that when they attended any of the services of the Church, it was but decent and proper that they should be still and quiet : moreover, he said that there was a great deal of good to be got from these services, if we attended to them, and joined in them as we ought to do. He said that he did not wish to keep them away from the church on such occasions, for he was always glad to see them there ; but that they ought to consider themselves as a congregation assembled in God's house, and ought to conduct themselves accordingly ; that they should come before the service began, that they might not disturb the body, and that they should take their seats in the church and join in the service, and do it with devotion and reverence : and he could then look at them with pleasure, and believe that, when they all joined together in prayer to the Almighty, their petitions would be heard. And I assure you, William, that the people who came to the wedding this morning, all seemed as if they remembered what he had said. They all took their places, and all behaved steadily ; some had Prayer Books with them, and it seemed to me as if they all joined in the prayers.

W. Certainly, Thomas, the people present are supposed to be a congregation of Christian worshippers, and the minister is directed to address them as such. At the beginning of the service he says, " Dearly beloved, we are gathered together in the sight of God, and in the face of *this congregation*, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony." And then we may expect a blessing when all the people present join in such a prayer as this :—" O eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all

spiritual life ; send thy blessings upon these thy servants,"—"that they may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

T. I say, William, the more I think of these things, the more consistent and excellent I see that all the services of our Church are ; and therefore, the more one feels disturbed when they are not looked upon as they ought to be. But I can assure you, as far as outward appearance went, every thing this morning was very much what one could wish.

W. Why, you know, we can only judge by outward appearance, we can see no farther ; and we know that if things are wrong outwardly, they cannot be right within.

T. No, that is true ; but there may be a good fair outside appearance, whilst all is wrong within.

W. Certainly ; but of that "God is the Judge."—When, however, I see a solemn attention to outward forms, I am always disposed to hope that some good is going on within ; and I wish to consider decency of behaviour as a sign that the heart is right.

T. This is the charitable way of considering the matter, certainly, and I hope it is often the true way : and we may say, I think, that devotional outward behaviour often *leads* to an inward devotion of the heart ; so that I really believe that our minister's attention to all the services of the Church has been the means of producing a real spirit of religion in this parish, and has, with God's blessing, brought many to a knowledge of the truth, and a desire to believe and to live like real Christians.

W. I fully believe it, Thomas ; and, as you justly say, it must be "with God's blessing :"—

for "Paul may plant, and Apollos may water," but it must be "God that giveth the increase."

T. Yes ; and our minister seems to be fully sensible of that ; and whilst he seems so anxious that all things should be done "decently and in order," he always tries to convince us that it is not merely for the sake of form that he wishes this, but that we may obtain the blessings which we ask for, and which we cannot expect to obtain if we ask them in a careless, irreverent, and trifling manner.

W. This must be all right, Thomas.

T. I think so ; but, talking of the marriage service, we often see that it is considered something that people need not be thoughtful or serious about. I am sure those who made the service of the Church did not look upon it in that way. *They* did not consider it as a matter to be made light of.

W. Certainly, they did not ; neither ought *we*. I have sometimes seen some of the silly people in the church look about them and laugh when they have heard the banns published ; but all this is wrong.

T. To be sure. And there is a custom which I have seen in some parishes, but I must say it appears to me a very bad one. I mean the wedding-people meeting at a public-house before the service, and walking from the ale-house to the church.

W. Why, that is very bad indeed, Thomas ; I hope it is not a common practice.

T. I hope not ; for when once the people are in the public-house, we may expect that there will be some drinking going on.

W. Yes, and just on going into the church too, and entering upon an engagement on which so

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much of the happiness of this world, and probably of the next, may depend ! On such an occasion, nothing should be done to disturb the mind, and keep it from that calm and devout reflection which it ought then particularly to possess. But, if people go to the ale-house before they go to be married, they will probably go to church in a wrong state of mind. Neither should they go to the ale-house *after* the wedding : it is the worst place they can keep the wedding at.

T. I think so indeed.—Well, as I said before, we had every thing this morning quite as one could have wished. I think I never paid so much attention to the marriage service before. I could not help feeling greatly affected by it. It is a beautiful service.

W. Yes ; and it is wonderful to see how little attention we are apt to pay to these services ; for whenever we think of them as we ought to do, we cannot help seeing how very noble, and beautiful, and devout they are. The Church seems to have a Christian watchfulness for all her people ; she would willingly lead them in the way of godliness from the cradle to the grave.

T. It is very true. I was much struck with the solemn address of the minister this morning, at the beginning of the marriage service, where he speaks to the people, and with the true affection of a Christian, calls them his “ Dearly beloved ;” and he then said, that we are gathered together “ in the sight of GOD, and of this congregation.” This was enough, at once, to put an end to trifling thoughts. Then he went on to tell us that “ Matrimony was an honourable state, instituted by God Himself,”—and that it was therefore not to be undertaken “ unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly.” I thought it good to be reminded

of these things : and this solemn address is well suited to engage the attention of all the congregation, as well as of the bridegroom and the bride. I think I shall make it my business often to look at the vow which I myself made at my marriage, that I may see what I have so solemnly promised, and examine myself whether, in my own behaviour to my wife, I am keeping my vow or not.

W. I think that is a very good plan. I have for many years been in the habit of reading over the service every year on my wedding-day.

T. And I think I shall do the same, as long as it shall please God that I may live. The husband promises to "love his wife, to honour and keep her in sickness and in health ; and, forsaking all others, keep only to her as long as they both shall live." Now, whoever is unkind to his wife,—or neglects her,—or is unfaithful to her,—or who does not comfort her in her sickness, or exert himself to support her in her health, is not only doing a very cruel thing, but is behaving in a manner quite dishonourable, and breaking a very solemn vow.

W. What think you, Thomas, of a man spending his time and his money at the ale-house, whilst his poor wife at home is almost breaking her heart for his absence, and counting every moment till he comes home again ?

T. I don't like to call names, William, but there is hardly any name bad enough for such a man. But our neighbour, Jack Simkins, says, that his wife is so cross, and everything is so miserable at his own house, that he can't bear home.

W. Yes ; but whose fault is that ? If Jack would be more careful, and bring his money home for his family, his wife could get things more nice

and comfortable, and make his house as tidy as other people's.

T. I think so too ; he does not put it in her power to have things as they should be ; and then he grumbles because things are wrong. But then he says that his wife always looks so cross and melancholy when he goes home, that he has no pleasure there.

W. Ah, poor thing ; she has enough to make her melancholy. However, it is her duty to try to make home agreeable to her husband as far as she can. If he is cross with her she should still try to behave well to him : a kind and cheerful look, as if she was glad to see him, might do him good. She, perhaps does not do her best in trying to please him ; there may be faults on both sides.

T. Oh, yes ! and, you know, the woman is bound as well as the man :—she is to “obey him, and to serve him,” as well as to “love and honour him.” I do not understand, by this, that the wife is to be the slave of her husband ;—but, to prevent disputes, and to promote peace and harmony, it is needful that *one* should submit,—and *God* hath decided which it shall be.

W. Yes : and if the husband be a Christian-minded man, he will never require anything but what it would be the pleasure of a Christian wife to do.

T. That is certainly true. Well, I assure you, all the service seemed to me this morning to come with great power, and to be full of very important meaning. I don't know how it was, but no part of it seemed to escape me ; it certainly is a very affecting service. But you know, and we need not therefore go through it together, as we have done some of the other services.

W. Why, it is so plain to any person who will give good attention to it, that it requires only to be read with proper thoughtfulness, and its true meaning will presently be seen.

T. I was wonderfully struck with the solemn prayer to the Almighty as soon as the ring was put on: it is a prayer to the "eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, the Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life, that He would send his blessing upon these his servants,—that they may perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to God's laws, through Jesus Christ."

W. Yes, and how beautiful, and how solemn and Christian-like is the blessing which the minister gives to the married couple,—or I should rather say, that he begs of *God* to give them!

"God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you: the Lord mercifully look upon you; and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting."

T. Yes, that is noble! And then the Psalm, and the Lord's Prayer, and the petitions that are offered to the Almighty to give his blessing to his "servant and his handmaid!—All this makes it what I call a truly religious service; and it ought certainly to be considered as such, and to be very highly regarded and respected.

W. Certainly: and if we are in earnest in what we pray for, we shall try to cultivate that Christian disposition of love and affection which we beg of God to bestow upon us. The priest offers up this prayer, that God would "pour upon those whom he has joined together in marriage, the

riches of his grace, that He would sanctify and bless them, that they may please Him both in body and soul, and live together in holy love unto their lives' end."

T. This is beautiful! and how excellent is the exhortation; or sermon that the minister reads to the married couple before they leave the church! It is full of spiritual instruction how a man ought to behave himself to his wife,—and how a wife ought to behave herself towards her husband. And we here find a consideration mentioned, which it concerns us all very seriously to think of; that the "good conversation," the religious disposition and behaviour of the wife, may be the means of winning an ungodly husband to the faith and fear of God. And, in like manner, that a religious husband may be the means of leading an ungodly wife to "the knowledge and the love of the truth."

W. Yes, these are important considerations indeed! And if both are brought to a real love of that which is good, what an effect this must have upon their children after them! There is no seeing the end of the good which religious parents may be the means of doing.

T. Very true:—nor of the harm which bad parents may do. The good or the harm may, and probably will, run through many generations. But I must now leave you, William, and I wish every married couple would take these matters into consideration. The advice which ends the marriage service (from St. Peter) would be useful to many of the young women of our day—"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on apparel: but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a

meek and quiet spirit, which is, in the sight of God, of great price."

W. Yes, this is excellent. And pray, Thomas, did you look at what the rubric says, at the end of the marriage service:—recommending the married couple to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the first opportunity after their marriage?

T. Yes; and I have had some conversation both with Richard and his wife on that very point. They both seemed to think that it was right: and they both, I know, intend to do it. They seemed as if they should consider it as a great comfort thus to dedicate themselves to the Almighty together, and thus to seek for his blessing.

W. Yes. Whatever we begin in the faith and fear of God, we may reasonably look for his blessing upon,—and on so important an event in our lives, what can we hope for *without* his blessing?

T. The blessing of God is certainly the first thing we ought to seek for.—But, William, I had almost forgotten to ask you what you think is the meaning of the word *worship*? The husband says, "With my body I thee *worship*:"—what can this mean?

W. Why, I look upon it that it means the same as *honour*; just as we sometimes say to a gentleman, *your worship*, and sometimes *your honour*, both meaning the same thing. The bridegroom shows by this expression, that he receives his bride into a state of *honourable* wedlock,—he puts on the ring as a pledge of this sacred promise, and he at the same time endows her with all his worldly goods.



CONVERSATION V.

VISITATION OF THE SICK.

William. How are you, Thomas? I was wishing to see you to ask after your poor father. I hear that he is very ill.

Thomas. He is, indeed, William; he is very ill; and he is, you know, now at a great age. I doubt we shall lose him. It is a great comfort, however, to me, to see that he is so patient and resigned. He suffers a good deal of pain at times; but we never hear him murmur or complain. He thinks himself that he shall go, but this does not distress him; he feels as if he was going to a better place.

W. What a blessing, and what a comfort it is

for a man to find such support in his latter end ! But I do believe that your father is a sincere Christian, and he now experiences the blessing and the happiness of having studied to serve the Lord faithfully. He seems to be receiving those great consolations which support the dying Christian.

T. It is a great comfort to me, I assure you, to think so. But I have known many sincere Christians, who have had their doubts and fears when death seemed to be approaching ; and, on the other hand, many people who had been very indifferent about religion, have seemed quite easy at the approach of death.

W. Oh, yes, it is indeed sometimes so : a man who has been indifferent about how he lives, is often indifferent also about how he dies. The same thoughtlessness which belonged to him in his life, continues with him to the last : but this you know, is no proof of safety.

T. Oh, no, quite the contrary. And then I think that the reason why some sincere Christians are full of anxiety at the thoughts of death, is that they know what is the true and right rule of duty : they know, I mean, what the word of God requires of them ; and they fear, because when they think of even their best services, they see how very far short they have come.

W. Why, yes, this I take to be the cause ; and this is the reason why those good Christians who have made it the desire of their lives to do those things which the Gospel requires of them, have generally wished to lay aside all dependence upon their own works, and to place all their hopes of salvation on the merits of their Redeemer.

T. Yes ; it is indeed so. A Christian's hopes must be *there*. No man's works have ever yet reached the rule of Christian obedience ; and the

more anxious a man is to do right, the more he sees his own insufficiency ; and the more desirous he is of resting on a better righteousness than his own for salvation. No man's works can be such as to be of value in the sight of God. The best of men must see, most clearly, that they are unprofitable servants.

W. Certainly. But yet a man is not to suppose that he may live as he pleases ; and then say that he trusts to the merits of Christ, and therefore expects to be saved.

T. Oh, no : the merits of Christ are the *Christian's* hope ; but we can hardly call a man a Christian who has persisted in living just as he pleases, and who has never tried to follow the directions of Christ. A sincere Christian is one who believes in Christ, and who seeks to do his will.

W. Undoubtedly : but yet if a man has not lived as a Christian ought to do, he is not cut off from the hope of acceptance, if he really desires to repent and forsake his sins, and is earnestly seeking for pardon through the merits of Christ.

T. I hope I have not said anything which can lead you to think that I would doubt the mercy of God, or the sufficiency of the merits of Christ ; for these are indeed unbounded, so that the greatest sinner is invited to repentance, and is told that, by the atonement made for his sins on the cross, he may be received into favour. To deny this, or to doubt it, or to refuse to hold out such gracious promises to a repenting sinner, seems to me to be keeping back an offer which the Almighty Himself has, in his mercy, given us. But yet a repentance, begun only when death seems to threaten, is so hazardous, and its sincerity so doubtful, that we ought all of us to dread the putting off this great work to such an hour ; and

we ought all to try to give the best of our days to the service of God.

W. To be sure. I agree with you entirely there. In a Christian, we ought to expect some Christian works, both as the fruits of faith, and as a preparation for his eternal abode. The employment of the saints in heaven is to do the will of God: this, then, is the right preparation of Christians upon earth, and it ought therefore to be their work.

T. To be sure. The Almighty can judge whether a man's repentance and faith be sincere, even though no opportunity should be allowed of proving this before men. But yet I do think, that, on a death-bed, a fear of punishment may lead a man just so far as to tremble for his past sins: and he may think he repents; whereas, if he were to recover, he would be as bad again as ever: and this is therefore no true repentance. Besides, we may be cut off suddenly, without even this opportunity of reflecting on our past lives; and, moreover, sin gains so much strength by habit, that the longer a man puts off his repentance, the harder the work is: he has also more to repent of, and less time to do it in. And these reasons, and many more, show us the danger of putting off the time for considering our latter end, and warn us against the danger of a death-bed repentance.

W. Oh, yes; and if even a long sickness does give us time to think of these things, how grievous it is to be harassed in our minds with the thoughts of a life of rebellion against God, at the very time when we want all the comfort and support which religion can give us! When a minister comes to visit a sick sufferer, what a blessing it is when he can, from his conscience, afford him those consola-

tions, and hold up to him those glorious hopes, which belong to the faithful followers of Jesus Christ ! But what a painful thing it must be for a faithful minister of Christ, to visit the sick-bed of one who has never appeared till then to have thought seriously of his latter end ! I have often thought that this must be the most distressing part of a minister's duty.

T. I think it must. But what a very important one it is ! And what a beautiful service the Church provides for the visitation of the sick ! You and I have often talked of the prayers which we offer up *in the church* ; but when we are prevented, by sickness, from attending at church, we have an opportunity given us of worshipping *at home* ; and the minister of Christ holds out to the sick members of his flock that wholesome medicine which the Gospel affords. Our good minister called on my poor father yesterday, and I assure you it was a great comfort to us all to bring our griefs before the throne of grace, and to unite with the old man in our prayers and praises to our all-merciful Father who is in heaven.

W. Oh, yes, the prayers for the sick make a beautiful service. How can we help being comforted, and how can we help putting our trust in our heavenly Father, and looking to Him for help, whilst we offer up such a prayer as this ?—"O Lord, look down from heaven ; behold, visit, and relieve this thy servant. Look upon him with the eyes of thy mercy, give him sure confidence in Thee, defend him from the danger of the enemy, and keep him in perpetual peace and safety, through Jesus Christ our Lord." In such a prayer as this, one cannot but look up to that great and merciful Being, who will dispose of us, and all that belongs to us, in the way which He knows

to be the best. Indeed the whole of this service is just what we could wish for at such a time. There is a beautiful address to the sick person, to exhort him to think rightly of the purpose for which his sickness was sent, and to show him how it is to be turned to his spiritual "profit, and to help him forward in the way that leadeth unto everlasting life."

T. Yes ; and the priest is then directed to ask the sick person some questions as to his belief, to see whether he places his hopes on the right foundation. As soon as we are admitted into the flock of Christ by baptism, our faith is declared. We worship the Father who made us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Holy Ghost the Sanctifier of the people of God. The minister, therefore, very properly asks, whether the sick man continues true to the Christian profession, and his Christian faith.

W. Yes. But many, I fear, when they are asked whether they believe these things, answer, that they do, or that they "steadfastly believe them," without considering what is meant by the questions that are asked.

T. I am afraid so. It is an easy thing at a baptism, or a marriage, or at a confirmation, or on a sick-bed, to say, "I do," or "I will," or "All this I steadfastly believe : " but it is quite another thing to have that faith and sincerity which on all such occasions is required.

W. But I think, Thomas, we may see how consistent and how right it is for the Church to lay before us these necessary questions ; and if we don't answer them with a right mind, nobody is to blame but ourselves.

T. That is very true. But many people do not know what questions are to be asked, and they

therefore do not know what to answer. That is the reason why we see people at a christening just nod their heads, instead of giving the right answer as it is written in the book.

W. Why, these things are not studied enough. If we belong to the Church, we ought to study the Services of the Church. It would do us no harm to look at the Service for the Sick whilst we are well: we do not know how soon we may want it!—and we should then join in it with more benefit in our time of need.

T. I think we should. Sometimes, however, a sick man is in that state that he is hardly able to attend to the Service, and listen to the questions, and give the answers as he should do.

W. Very true. And this shows us the need of attending to the care of the soul whilst we are in health instead of putting it off till it is out of our power.

T. To be sure; but as to those people who do answer all these questions in the right words, how is the minister to know whether their faith be sincere or not?

W. He cannot know. But he is to ask such questions as are needful: and the true faith of a Christian is contained in the Apostles' Creed. This is the profession of faith that a Christian makes at his baptism. But whether the answers are given in sincerity and truth, must be left to the judgment of HIM who knoweth the hidden things of the heart.

T. It must be so. The minister, however, commonly puts some questions to the sick person, by which he may be enabled to judge of the state of his mind: and at such time he can generally find this out, and he can then act accordingly. Our minister, to be sure, did talk very comfortably to

my father, before we went to prayers yesterday : and his words, I hope, were a benefit to us all, and prepared us to join, with more advantage, in the prayers which followed. How beautiful is the prayer which begins thus : and what a call upon us all to repentance ! “ O most merciful God, who according to the multitude of thy mercies, dost so put away the sins of those who truly repent, that thou rememberest them no more ; open thine eye of mercy upon this thy servant,” &c. The whole of this prayer is very beautiful, and I could not help being greatly affected by it.

W. I do not wonder at it, indeed, Thomas.

T. And then how suitable and how full of comfort is the psalm which is chosen ! the 71st it is, I think. It is, indeed, what may be considered as a very fine *prayer* ; and we can all join in it, and make it a *petition*.

W. Oh, yes, it may and ought to be used in that way.

T. And then how very solemn and Christian-like is that short prayer, “ O Saviour of the world, who by thy cross and precious blood, hast redeemed us ; save us and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord !”

W. Yes, this is a noble address to Him who hath redeemed us, that, in our time of need, He would save us and help us.

T. And then, again, how sacred and how full of comfort are the words which the minister speaks to the sick sufferer before he leaves him ! They leave him, as it were, in the hands of God : they seem so strikingly to show the power of the arm that supports him, and all of us ; and they teach us so entirely to rest our confidence of salvation on Christ alone, that we have here all that comfort which the Gospel gives us,—and we have it at a time when we

want it most. They assure us that "the Almighty is a most strong tower to all them that put their trust in Him," and "that there is none other name under heaven given to man, in whom and through whom he may receive health and salvation, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I do assure you I felt a great comfort, and I hope we all derived benefit from the minister's visit ; and I shall not easily forget my poor father's looks when the minister said to him, "Unto God's gracious mercy and protection we commit thee. The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace, both now and evermore."





CONVERSATION VI.

THE ORDER OF THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD.

WILLIAM WALKER AND HIS WIFE.

Mrs. W. WELL, dear, and so you are come back from the funeral. Poor old Sam Brown! I think he will be a good deal missed. He was, I do believe, a true Christian: and his advice and help were often very useful to his neighbours.

William. I believe so, indeed. But he is gone to a better place: he has been long a sufferer here,

but he was enabled to bear his sufferings with patience, and indeed with thankfulness : his hopes were fixed on the right foundation, and he died "the death of the righteous." His faith was strong in the merits of his Lord and Saviour ; there he rested all his hopes, and this rock was his strength.

Mrs. W. Oh yes ; he rested on a support that could not fail him ; and it is a great comfort to think, that, as far as we can judge, his life was in agreement with his death. He has long been a man who seemed desirous of walking in all the ways of truth and of Christian duty ; his faith showed itself by his works.

W. And yet he never seemed to trust to his works. His trust was in Christ. He built on the right foundation ; and thus his death was happy. It is true that we cannot always judge of a man's state by his feeling on his death-bed ; but, generally speaking, a Christian who understands the Gospel right, and has lived according to his knowledge, will be the happiest in his end. To live the life of the righteous is the best of all preparations to die the death of the righteous ; and so I think it was with poor Brown. Poor fellow ! I cannot forget him. And the thoughts of what he was gave a sort of solemn feeling during the whole time of his funeral,—very different from what we experience when we attend the funeral of a man whose past life and whose death you cannot think of with comfort.

Mrs. W. Oh, yes ; it is very different indeed.

W. The whole of the Funeral Service seems to me as if it were made upon a supposition that the man has been a true Christian :—that he has lived and died in the faith.

Mrs. W. Yes, I think so.

W. And this is all right. Our Church brings us

up to be Christians from our childhood ; she supplies us with spiritual help from our Baptism to our Burial ; and all the Services of the Church contain such promises and such instructions as the Scriptures offer to those who, having professed the faith of Christ, are desirous of serving Him. Those who fall from the Christian faith and practice will be called to an account hereafter. We need not judge them : we must hope for the best. But, whenever we attend a funeral, we see what manner of men we ought to be :—and we cannot help being filled with a very melancholy feeling when we fear that the character of him whom we lament has been very different from what we know that it ought to be, and which, at such a time, we could so much wish that it had been.

Mrs. W. It is very true. “Blessed are the dead which *die in the Lord*.” But I cannot help thinking that the Burial Service was intended for the good of the *living* :—so that it is our business to try what benefit we can derive from it, that we may thus be induced to prepare for our own end, that we may inherit the blessing of those who “after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity.”

W. Oh, yes. And no service can be more likely to produce this effect than the Funeral Service : and no time can be more favourable for such impressions, than when we are standing by the grave of one who is gone to his account.

Mrs. W. A man must indeed be in a sad state who cannot be touched at such a time : and, as you say, the service in itself is particularly suitable for such a purpose.

W. Yes. How awful, and yet how full of comfort, is the opening ! “I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord,” &c. “I know that my

Redeemer liveth," &c. And then the Psalms,—how noble!—and how full of true religious consolation and instruction! And the Lesson from St. Paul to the Corinthians! who can hear this read without the most anxious desire to be one of those to whom God hath given "the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord?" and who does not wish to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,"—"forasmuch as he knows that his labour is not in vain in the Lord?" And then, when we get to the grave, and have our hearts humbled at the thought that all earthly things must soon come to an end with us all:—when we look at the coffin which contains the mortal remains of a beloved friend,—and when we know not "whose turn it may be next," we cannot help wishing and praying that we may be prepared for the change when our time shall come. We know that we must all die: for "man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live:"—"in the midst of life we are in death." And such thoughts make us utter this prayer from our hearts: "O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death."—"But spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee."

Mrs. W. And when we commit the body to the ground, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," what a blessing it is to think that, for the Christian, it is "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

W. Yes—that means for Christians in general.—But as for the particular person who is buried,

we do not speak of him with the same certainty, nor pretend to judge about him at all. These things are in the hand of the Almighty. We may hope,—and we will hope for the best. You know, we pray in the last Collect, that *we*, when we die, “may rest in the Lord, as *our* hope is that our departed brother doth.” This should be our *hope*;—we say no more;—we do not say that it is our *belief*, because we cannot know for a certainty.

Mrs. W. Very true : and, as we have said before, the Services of the Church were made for the cases of those who wish to go on regularly in a course of Christian teaching, and Christian performance ; and then we may *reasonably* hope that their eternal state will be a happy one. We cannot make a religious service for those who break their Christian vows, and live in opposition to the rules of a holy Church.—They must answer for themselves.—The Church undertakes to nourish and bring up, and supply with spiritual food, her faithful children ; and she begins with them in their infancy, and does not desert them in their death : “Blessed are the dead which die *in the Lord*,—even so, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours.”

W. This is all quite true ; I must not, however, forget to tell you of one thing that pleased me much.

Mrs. W. What was that, William ?

W. Why, you know, at a funeral, you often see the idle boys playing about the church-yard, quite careless about what is going on ; and this is a very bad thing for them, and very distressing to the people at the funeral. But it was quite different to-day. The children, that used to be playing about, all got round the grave to-day, and behaved very solemnly, and seemed all to join in the service.

Mrs. W. Oh, yes, I heard that the minister had

been talking to the children about this, and that they seemed to be convinced how wrong it was to be playing about at such a time ; and that they saw, by what he said, that if they gave attention to the Service, they might expect to find great benefit from it, and be led to think of such things as every mortal ought to take to heart. I see, then, the reason why the children behaved so properly.

W. Yes. It is plain now : and I am very glad to find that they are so attentive to what is said to them.





CONVERSATION VII.

ON THE CHURCHING OF WOMEN.

MRS. WALKER AND MRS. BROWN.

Mrs. Walker. How do you find yourself to-day, neighbour Brown! I hope you are beginning to get about again, after your confinement—and how does the little baby do?

Mrs. Brown. Thank you, neighbour Walker, the baby is very well indeed; and I think I begin to feel myself a great deal better. I have had a longer confinement this time than usual, and I have not been so well as I commonly have been at such times. However, I have a great deal to be thankful for. I feel as if I was getting pretty strong again, and I reckon upon being able to return thanks next Sunday, at church. It is a

great satisfaction for me to think that I shall be able to get to church again, and I am sure it is my duty to give thanks to the Almighty, when I think of the great mercies that I have just received from Him.

Mrs. W. Yes, it is our duty at *all times* to be thankful: but when we have lately received any particular mercy, our hearts will then be more particularly led to return our thanks; I mean, if we feel as we ought to do.

Mrs. B. Why, I should certainly wish to feel grateful, and I hope I do. I am sure I have great reason to be thankful, when I think how mercifully I have been delivered, and I feel it is a great privilege to be able to return my thanks in the church for all the blessings which I have received.

Mrs. W. Why, yes, neighbour, I have always felt it so when I have been in the same situation; and I have often thought it a great happiness that there is a Service provided by the Church for the "Thanksgiving of women after child-birth." Indeed, whenever we have been kept at home by sickness, and are at length enabled to go to church again with our fellow-Christians, our hearts ought to be lifted up, in thankfulness, to Him who has shown us such great mercies: but in the case of recovering from "the pains and perils of child-birth," there seems a very particular call upon women to express their thankfulness. For, when we consider that the pains and dangers which are connected with bringing a child into the world were inflicted on the first woman for her sin, and from her have come down to us all, this leads us to think of our own sin and disobedience and to pray that the pains we suffer may show us the danger of sin, and the need of repent-

ance ; and this should teach us to seek for pardon, and to pray for the help of God, that his Spirit may enable us to forsake our sins, and turn unto Him in newness of life.

Mrs. B. Yes, this is indeed true. A long confinement gives an opportunity for reflection and consideration ; and when we are restored, we ought to return our sincerest thanks for our deliverance, and to seek, for the time to come, to live to God's service in humble thankfulness for all his favours. But how often we go to be "churched" without thinking what we go for !

Mrs. W. Why, it is sometimes so, indeed, neighbour ; and this is a very sad thing ! We ought not to go to such solemn services as a matter of form ; we ought to know what we go for, and consider the matter well beforehand, that we may go with a right mind. It is a great mockery to join in the solemn services of religion, and thus seem to honour the Lord with our lips, while our heart is far from Him.

Mrs. B. To be sure it is ;—it must be !

Mrs. W. I cannot, however, help hoping that women do generally feel a good deal of thankfulness for their deliverance, and that they go to this service with more sincerity than we are apt to think. I know, even before I thought much of religion, I never could go to church, after my confinements, without feeling very much indeed.

Mrs. B. Well, I hope it is so. It certainly is a time when our minds ought to be particularly turned to religion ; and, as you say, I believe they often are.

Mrs. W. Oh, yes, I know several women who never turned their thoughts to religion before, and yet whose minds have received very devout and lasting impressions from the danger of their con-

finement and the mercy of their recovery,—and from the call which the Church gives to them to return their thanks to their Almighty Preserver.

Mrs. B. I really believe it is so. The time of our confinement gives us great opportunities of serious reflection ; and every consideration belonging to our situation is calculated to lead our thoughts to religion. And when it has pleased God to restore us again, and we go to church to return our public thanks, how well suited the Service is to our condition, and how truly does it express the feelings of our hearts !

Mrs. W. The feelings, you mean, which *ought* to be in our hearts.

Mrs. B. Oh, yes, I mean so. The minister begins by reminding us that we have been lately delivered from a state of “great danger,”—that it is “Almighty God of his goodness,” who hath delivered us, and that we are therefore to give Him our “heartly thanks.”

Mrs. W. And then what a beautiful psalm of praise directly follows !

Mrs. B. Very, indeed. I suppose in such psalms as that King David is describing his own troubles, and then returning thanks to the Almighty for delivering him.

Mrs. W. Yes, I suppose so. But these same psalms are equally suitable to us all, whenever we have experienced any troubles, and have been delivered from them. And when we read such psalms we cannot help seeing that all people in every age, and in every condition, have had their trials.

Mrs. B. Yes : and they show us that there is the same merciful Lord to guard and protect his people at all times ; and that, as He always *has* been a great deliverer, so He always *will*.

Mrs. W. Yes ; we see that David, though a

king, had great trials ; and many of his psalms show us how great were his sufferings : but we also see that he puts his trust in the Almighty, and we always find that he was delivered.

Mrs. B. It is very true : and this must always be a great comfort and encouragement to every one who wishes to live to the service of his heavenly Lord and Master. There are two psalms put down in the Prayer Book for the Churching of Women. The minister sometimes reads one, and sometimes the other.

Mrs. W. Yes, they are the 116th, and the 128th : the second of them shows the blessing of having children ; and certainly this is a great blessing, if they turn out well.

Mrs. B. It certainly is ; and this should show us the need of bringing them up to the service of God. If, through God's grace, they do, hereafter, live a godly and Christian life, they will be a blessing to their parents, and to all that belong to them. They will be kept from many of the miseries which we see in the world : they will be enabled to bear their needful trials, and they will inherit the kingdom of heaven at last.

Mrs. W. Yes ; and we may therefore well count them blessings, and we may well say, that children are an "heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord ;" and how anxiously ought we to strive so to bring up our little ones that they may inherit these blessings !

Mrs. B. We ought indeed.—I think I have observed that the clergyman seldom reads the second of these psalms, if the poor child is dead.

Mrs. W. No ; it is better not. In that case, the first of them is more suitable. This first is suitable in any case.

Mrs. B. The Service, I think, goes on to the

end just as we could wish ; and expresses just what we should desire to say. There is a petition to the Lord to have mercy upon us ; and then there is the Lord's Prayer, which expresses what we ought to wish at all times, and so is suitable to every occasion. And when we feel as if we had lately been delivered from a great danger, we must be in a sad state indeed, if we cannot then offer it up with a particular feeling of devotion !

Mrs. W. Yes ; and it is at such times that we find the greatest of all comforts to arise from making our requests known unto the Lord. Who can help feeling it a great privilege to offer up such prayers as these to the Lord, and to know that He will graciously receive them ?

“O Lord, save this woman thy servant,”

“Who putteth her trust in Thee.”

“Be thou to her a strong tower,”

“From the face of her enemy.”

“Lord, hear our prayer,”

“And let our cry come unto Thee.”

Mrs. B. If we feel at all as we should do, these will be the sort of requests which we shall desire to make. And then how beautiful the last is, in which we humbly return thanks to the Almighty for the deliverance which we have just experienced !—and all who are present join in this thanksgiving. It seems to me to be one of the great marks of a Christian to have a heart open to gratitude for the blessings which he receives, and to know and to acknowledge that all these blessings come from God.

Mrs. W. To be sure.

Mrs. B. And then we all pray that the woman who has been restored, and is now returning her thanks, may show her real thankfulness by the

effect which the mercy of God produces on her heart and on her conduct.

Mrs. W. Yes, this is the true way to judge of ourselves, and to know whether we are truly thankful. God's mercies should lead us to thankfulness ; and if there is real thankfulness, there will be a desire and an endeavour to do the will of Him who is so full of mercy and compassion to us.

Mrs. B. Yes, and therefore we pray for the person who hath lately so particularly experienced the mercy of God, that God would enable her "faithfully to live and walk according to his will in this life present."

Mrs. W. Yes ; and such a life will, through Christ's merits, lead to eternal happiness hereafter.

Mrs. B. Yes ; and we therefore ask of God, that, after such a life of obedience to his will, "she may be partaker of everlasting glory in the life to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Mrs. W. I never can look at the prayers of our Church without seeing how they all, and every one of them, agree in the same great doctrine. We see it in this prayer : it is "through Jesus Christ our Lord" alone, that we can ever hope to be "partakers of everlasting glory in the life to come." But we find that the preparation for that life is "faithfully to live and walk according to his will in this life present."

Mrs. B. It is exactly so. And may God grant us his heavenly grace to enable us to live such a Christian life !

Mrs. W. Well, we have every promise that it shall be so, if we sincerely ask it.

Mrs. B. But the burden of past sin will sit heavy, even though we are trying to lead a new life, and though we have reason to think that God is helping us.

Mrs. W. Yes, but the promises of *pardon*ing mercy, through Christ, are as strong as the promises of *strengthening* grace.

Mrs. B. It is so indeed. It is on Christ's merits alone that the Bible and the Church teach us to rest. This is a gracious promise to a Christian : "He is faithful and just to *forgive* us our sins, and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness."

Mrs. W. Yes, this is indeed a gracious promise, and very full of comfort. And what comfortable words we have in the Communion Service of the Church ! and we feel them, I think, most particularly on receiving the Sacrament after having been delivered from any trial or danger, such as the great pain or peril of childbirth. The Prayer Book, you know, says that, after the woman has returned thanks, and if there be an opportunity, it is right that she should receive the Holy Communion.

Mrs. B. Why this I should like to do, certainly, the very first opportunity.

Mrs. W. I am very glad that this is your intention.

Mrs. B. Oh, yes, I should not think of neglecting it. I know that I can never do anything in return for all that has been done for me, but I should wish to do all I can to express how much I feel it. I cannot, therefore, turn my back on a Service appointed by the Lord : and which I see to be intended entirely for my own good. "I will receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows in the presence of all his people, in the court of the Lord's house, even in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord."

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